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Historical Perspectives on Urban Design: Washington, D.C. 1890-1910

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Introduction

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The period 1890-1910 was a landmark era for the design of Washington, D.C. In its influence on the appearance of the city, this period was nearly as important as the era from 1790-1810, a century earlier, when the national capital was created and occupied by the federal government. In the earlier period, the city was formed out of the ideas of Jefferson, Washington, and L'Enfant on a landscape dotted by farms and the small urban settlements of Georgetown and Hamburg. A century later, design activities reshaped a city populated by more than 250,000 inhabitants. By this time, urbanization had spread well beyond the L'Enfant city, bounded by what is now Florida Avenue, into the ten-mile square District and into nearby Maryland and Virginia.

The replanning of Washington in the period 1890-1910 was guided in part by a later interpretation of L'Enfant's plan and by the accumulated experience since that time in architecture, landscape architecture, and efforts in city improvement and sanitation that later became identified with the city planning movement. The designers who formulated the McMillan Plan had as guidance their experience with the temporary Chicago World Columbian Exposition of 1893 which had been laid out on the barren expanse of Jackson Park. The situation in Washington was altogether different. Here, the city had been developed and any changes to its form would be permanent. The design team also had to contend with members of Congress, various federal agencies which had an interest in the public spaces and buildings in Washington, and the burgeoning architectural profession.

The McMillan Plan is most readily identified as the spearhead of the City Beautiful urban plans, where public buildings of the Beaux Arts style were sited within a larger urban landscape of parkland and civic spaces. These plans were carved out of existing urban fabric, usually areas identified with urban decay, congested slums, or reclaimed marshes. Until recently, City Beautiful plans were viewed in a negative light as grandiose, forbidding, and pretentious. Their grand scale appeared to express little concern with people and the residential city. The presumptuous imposition of large-scale planning over an already developed area was seen as an urban antidote that reached its nadir in the urban renewal plans of the 1950's and 1960's.

In Washington, the McMillan Plan has been criticized for the severity of lines and spaces in the Mall. Suggestions have been made to introduce natural contours, such as found in the Constitution Gardens of the 1970's, in order to balance the geometric precision. The Federal Triangle, dating from the late 1920's to the late 1930's, along the northern boundary of the Mall was derivative of the McMillan Plan. The Triangle complex was viewed as a virtually impenetrable wall of large public buildings that formed a barrier between the Mall and the city's downtown commercial district. At the height of the struggle to preserve the Romanesque-style Old Post Office of the 1890's on Pennsylvania Avenue, the Post-Office was endowed with

human qualities above and beyond those of the surrounding Triangle buildings. In the 1970's, the Post Office represented "what the city was all about," while the Triangle's monumental form and details represented everything the city was not supposed to be.

Today the McMillan Plan is receiving increased appreciation. This change in attitude is due in part to the growing interest in architecture, landscape architecture, and city planning of the early twentieth century. At the local level, the McMillan Plan is cited in the District of Columbia Comprehensive Plan of 1984, along with the L'Enfant Plan, as a historic resource of "transcendent importance." At the national level, the McMillan Plan has gained additional recognition as a plan of national significance, a model for many subsequent City Beautiful plans that influenced planning in both large and small cities.

Study of the McMillan Plan reveals that while its contributions are most readily evident in the Mall, it is more accurately described as a comprehensive plan that dealt with all facets of the city. In the monumental core, the plan drew together major existing buildings, such as the Capitol, the Washington Monument, and the White House into a single coherent scheme. Beyond aesthetics, the plan was also concerned with sanitation, recreation, neighborhood identity, transportation, parks, and the reclamation of the Potomac and Anacostia River shorelines. The published plan wielded power beyond that of its immediate successors in other cities. It was the guiding light in the work of the Fine Arts Commission from the formation of the Commission in 1910 until well into the 1930's.

Despite a renewed interest in the McMillan Plan, it is virtually unknown to the general public. Thus, when the National Museum of American Art invited cultural and educational organizations in the District of Columbia to develop public programs that would coincide with and complement the exhibit, "The Capital Image: Painters in Washington, 1800-1915" (October 19, 1983-January 22, 1984), the McMillan Plan appeared to be an appropriate subject. The topic drew upon the interest of three local organizations and institutions: the Latrobe Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians, the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Planning Association, and the Center for Washington Area Studies at George Washington University. Professor Howard Gillette of George Washington, Gail C. Rothrock of the APA's Preservation Committee, and I, representing the Latrobe Chapter, planned the conference as a means to examine the origins and influence of the McMillan Plan. We also anticipated that the conference would focus needed public attention on the plan.

The centerpiece of the conference consisted of the papers presented by Professor Jon A. Peterson of Queen's College and Dr. Cynthia Field of the Smithsonian Institution. Professor Peterson's previous scholarship on the evolution of city planning in the United States during the nineteenth century pro-

vides the context for his paper included here. The sequence of events and cast of characters are traced in detail, providing the essential background to the McMillan Plan's comprehensive proportions. Peterson ascribes the "presumptuous" nature of the plan as much to the grand vision of the Commission members as to the need of the effort to accommodate the desires of the professional and constituent groups that professed a vital interest in the future growth of the city. Dr. Field explores the European trip on which the Commission members embarked in the course of formulating the plan. Often viewed as a junket, the European trip was significant in reinforcing the overall scope of the McMillan Plan as well as its details.

The commentaries written by Professors Frederick Gutheim and Richard Longstreth provide interpretation of the McMillan Plan from their own unique perspectives. Professor

Gutheim's involvement in architecture and planning since the 1930's and his changing attitude towards Daniel Burnham and the City Beautiful present a mirror image of the decline and revival in their appreciation. Professor Longstreth reflects on the important symbolism of the Mall, as well as West Coast and national antecedents to the Mall portion of the plan. Professor Longstreth also offers questions about modern uses of the Mall and the role of the Mall in the lives of Washington area residents and visitors.

Much in the same way that the L'Enfant Plan was "rediscovered" and found new appreciation a century after its issuance, perhaps the McMillan Plan might also be rediscovered by a new generation of Washington planners and citizens. Now a historic resource in its own right, the McMillan Plan might again be studied for its enduring contributions to the national capital and to the city planning movement nationwide.

The Hidden Origins of the McMillan Plan for Washington, D.C., 1900-1902*

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The U.S. Senate Park Commission report for Washington, D.C., issued early in 1902 and commonly known as the McMillan Plan, displayed a breadth and complexity unique for its day. This distinctive achievement had far-reaching consequences not only for the nation's capital but for the nation itself.¹ For the capital, the McMillan Plan redeemed and modified the original design of the city in fundamental ways. Thus in what today is the ceremonial core of Washington, the American citizen beholds from Capitol Hill westward to the Lincoln Memorial a stupendous scene, most of it arranged as a shrine-like corridor of monumental dimensions. Except for the McMillan Plan, this setting would not exist in its present form. Elsewhere within the District, including its fringes and beyond, less celebrated features of the city also derive in one way or another from the same undertaking. These include Union Station, the Federal Triangle, Anacostia Park, numerous links in the city park system, and the public shoreline of the Potomac River along the route of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal.

Nationally, the plan exerted other influences. Above all, it helped to crystallize the city planning movement in the United States during the first decade of this century. Prior to 1902, it must be remembered, even the boldest attempts to reshape American cities had not evolved much beyond limited-purpose undertakings. Designs for college campuses and exposition sites, for citywide park systems, for water supply, for land reclamation, for sewerage, for suburban tracts, and, in New York City, for mass transit, represented the most advanced forms of large-scale physical planning attempted during the late nineteenth century for already established urban areas. Complex as such schemes were, none addressed the whole city on a truly multipurpose basis. Even the most foresighted engineers, landscape designers, and architects in these years had rarely, if ever, advocated the fusion of all forms of physical design into a unitary endeavor for an entire city.²

But this idea, soon to be extolled as "comprehensive city planning," was suggested by the McMillan Plan. This happened for many reasons but chiefly because so many civic leaders throughout the United States recognized in the breadth, complexity, and boldness of the scheme a novel approach to the shaping of cities. Their efforts to emulate it by appointing their own local commissions and their own expert advisors soon gave rise to city planning as a recognizable movement.³

The root question underlying this discussion centers upon why the McMillan Plan itself achieved such novel comprehensiveness. Part of the answer lies in nineteenth-century ideas about public health, landscape values, and civic architecture, which prepared the group for the McMillan Plan. This paper, however, focuses chiefly upon how and why the various events

that directly gave rise to the plan yielded such pioneering results. From this vantage, the often voiced criticism of the scheme as stylistically derivative has little relevance. What is crucial here is to explain why the plan embraced so much all at once: proposals for parks, for building placement, for transportation, for sanitation, for slum removal, for public recreation, and for still other matters.

Traditionally, all historians of the Senate Park Commission have interpreted its origins as the outcome of two interacting chains of events. The first of these involved a series of efforts by prominent Washingtonians to sponsor a patriotic memorial of lasting value to the city in order to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the removal of the nation's capital from Philadelphia to the District of Columbia. The second was an adroit campaign by the American Institute of Architects to seize control of these initiatives and turn Washington into a showcase city displaying the profession's most advanced ideas of civic art.⁴

Although both developments help to account for the appointment of the Commission and will be retold briefly, three other sets of events, hitherto little recognized and obscured from view, decisively shaped the outcome as well. These three hidden origins of the McMillan Plan comprise the focal points of this study.

The first involved a serious proposal to build a massive new railroad terminal on the Mall as part of a complex effort to resolve the problem of grade crossings in the heart of the city. Conceived independently of and prior to the Centennial, this project, especially the projected terminal, blatantly threatened the already semi-sacred public grounds lying between the U.S. Capitol building and the Washington Monument and triggered talk of plans and counterplans for the ceremonial core of Washington, all in the name of the Centennial. The battle of plans, as this struggle will be called, laid the basis for the architects' intervention and helped to set in motion a broad review of the physical future of the entire city.

Also crucial to understanding the special comprehensiveness of the McMillan Plan are two other hidden developments. One involved the behind-the-scenes political bargain that led to the appointment of the Commission. Because of this bargain, the limited conception of planning brought to Washington by the architects was enlarged to include park system design. The other was the catalytic role of Daniel H. Burnham as Chairman of the Commission. Because of Burnham, the Commissioners disregarded the original instructions of their sponsor, Senator James McMillan, which were to produce only a "preliminary" design, and persuaded the Senator to promote instead the spectacular scheme that we remember today as the McMillan Plan.

I. Marking the Centennial

When the Centennial celebration was first proposed for Washington, D.C., its advocates wanted only a single, inspirational memorial to mark the event. The promoters were all local notables, many of them leaders of the Board of Trade, then the most powerful civic body in the capital. Organizing in October, 1898, they approached President William McKinley in mid-November, suggesting a number of ideas: a memorial hall, a majestic bridge across the Potomac, or some other durable work that would "inspire patriotism and a broader love of country." In December, McKinley appealed to Congress for action.⁵

This manner of recognizing the Centennial had no bearing upon city planning. The projects favored represented conventional, if costly, ideas typical of the piecemeal methods of city improvement prevalent in all American municipalities. Even so, Congress dragged its feet. Although the U.S. Senate soon appointed a Centennial committee and the President a national committee, the House of Representatives delayed a full year, until December, 1899. Worse still, neither the Senate nor the House authorized a concrete project. The memorial idea appeared doomed.

It wasn't—but events soon gave the idea a very unexpected twist. The original promoters decided to make one last try to redeem the memorial at a joint meeting of all the Centennial committees—local, congressional, and national—scheduled to take place February 21, 1900, at the Arlington Hotel. This was to be a glittering occasion. Arranged as much to honor the state governors who comprised the national committee as to make major decisions, it would culminate in a banquet hosted by the Board of Trade whose lavish staging would feature the surprise illumination of a huge "American flag of electric lights."⁶ Prior to the event, the local sponsors agreed among themselves to push the Potomac River bridge as their most popular goal. The Centennial, they imagined, would climax with the laying of its cornerstone. But to nearly everyone's surprise, the February 21st assemblage substituted entirely new objectives.⁷

This turnabout was the work of a powerful U.S. Senator from Michigan, James McMillan. Known in Washington as Chairman of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia and as a kingpin in District affairs, but hitherto inactive in the Centennial, McMillan won appointment at the morning session of the February 21st meeting to an ad hoc committee that was to evaluate the memorial proposals, especially the bridge idea, and to make recommendations to the larger gathering later that day.⁸ The Senator, who became chairman and spokesman for this group, seized the opportunity to redirect the Centennial.

That afternoon, the Senator announced a new agenda. In place of the much-favored bridge stood two new goals. The first called for the enlargement of the White House, an idea of long-standing in Washington. The second proposed the building of a three-mile-long Centennial Avenue to begin at the foot of Capitol Hill and to run obliquely through the Mall to the Potomac River, as shown in Figure 1.⁹ The latter idea appeared from out of the blue. It was, said *The Evening Star* the next day, "a new scheme, unverified by official surveys, virtually unheralded and unknown, and of, as yet, doubtful propriety."¹⁰ But the February 21st meeting endorsed it anyway, along with the White House recommendation, and also agreed to stage the celebration ten months later in December, 1900. The identity of the Avenue's designer, Henry Ives Cobb, an established Chicago architect, became known later.¹¹

II. Centennial Avenue

Senator McMillan's "grand thoroughfare," as he called it, signaled a critical turning point in the Centennial discussions. Above all, it gave new expression to a battle already underway between Senator McMillan and the Washington army engineering establishment over the fate of the Mall. Henceforth, their struggle would center upon talk of big physical plans. Centennial Avenue also caused other elements of the Washington community to voice still other concerns about the basic development of the city.

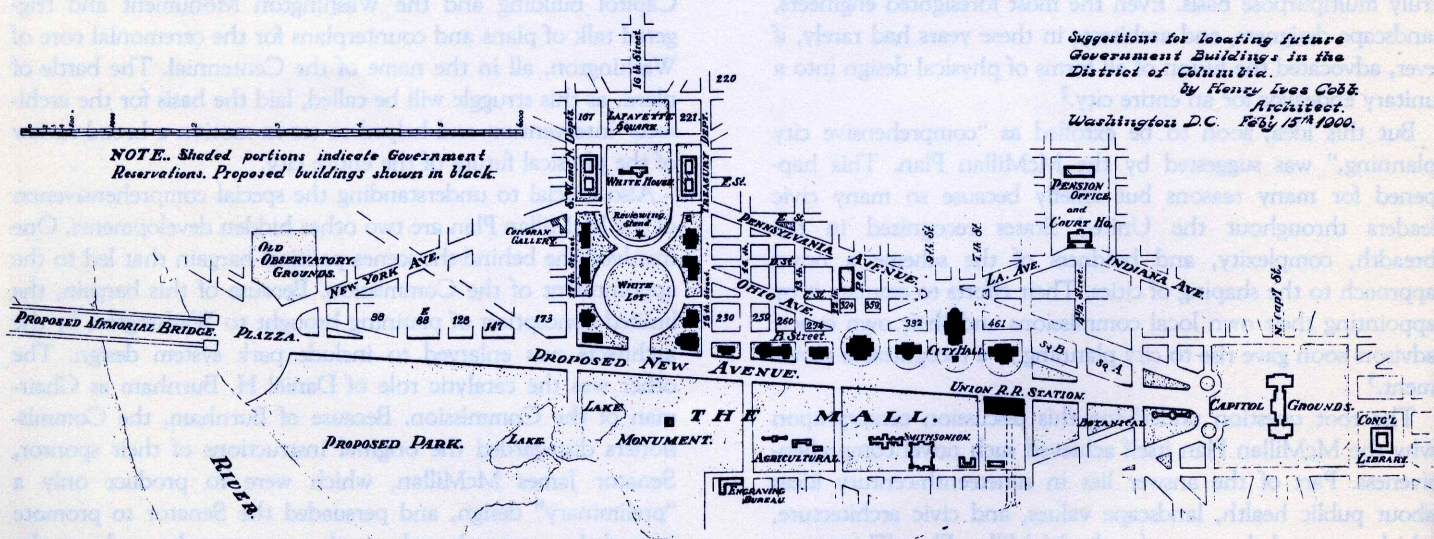


Figure 1. Plan for Centennial Avenue by Henry Ives Cobb, February 15, 1900. *Inland Architect* 35 (March 1900).

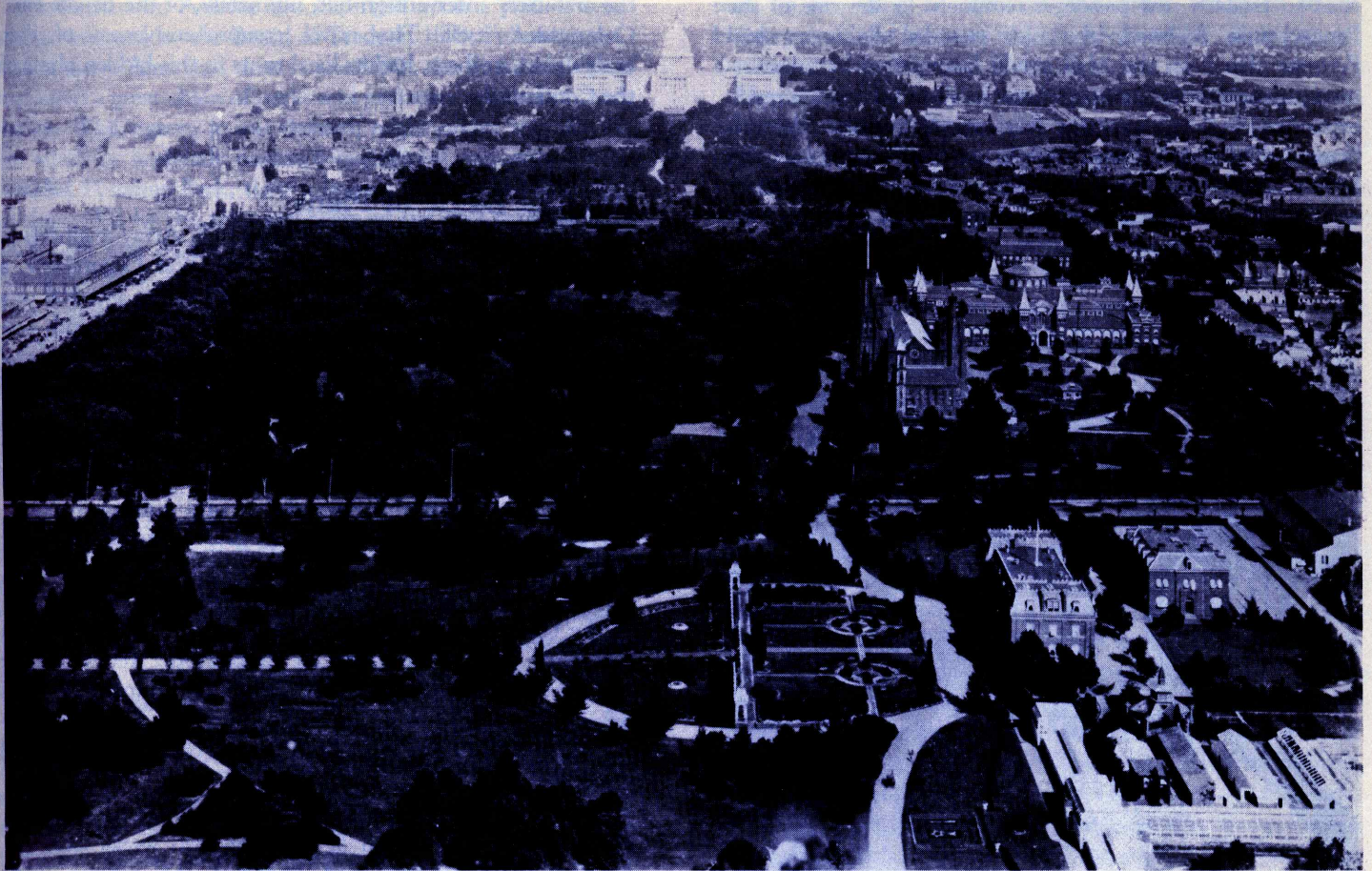


Figure 2. View of the Mall, c. 1900, showing the gardens of the Department of Agriculture (foreground) and of The Smithsonian Institution (mid-picture), and just beyond the latter, the station and sheds of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad. Library of Congress.

As the first and most important entrant into the battle of plans, the Centennial Avenue scheme raised a genuine civic art issue previously debated chiefly among architects. That was whether the original design of the Mall should be reinstated. On its face, this was a farfetched question to pose in the year 1900. In 1791 Pierre L'Enfant had imagined the Mall as a wide, extended open space flanked by "spacious houses," with a 400-foot-wide "Grand Avenue" down its center. By 1900, long matured parks and gardens of picturesque design belonging to the Smithsonian Institution and to the Department of Agriculture broke up the Mall as a unified space, as seen in Figure 2. In addition, the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad operated a sizable but antiquated depot in the Mall at Sixth and B Streets, NW, dating back to 1872, also visible in Figure 2.¹²

Apart from architects, few people in 1900 knew or cared much about the original plan. Oddly, Senator McMillan claimed to be one. The Centennial Avenue, he publically declared, would fulfill L'Enfant's dream and even provide sites for the grouping of public buildings, a civic art issue he knew to be current among architects.¹³

The Senator was not being candid. His Centennial Avenue had much less to do with L'Enfant and civic art than with two major pieces of railroad legislation that he had recently introduced into the U.S. Senate in December and January, 1899-1900.¹⁴ Both bills represented complex bargains ham-

mered out during the previous three years with the two railroads that entered the capital, one of them the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad, then a subsidiary of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The laws committed the railroads to eliminate grade crossings by removing tracks from the city streets, such as those on Maryland Avenue seen in Figure 3. This hazard that had filled or seriously injured as many as thirty people annually in the city. The laws in turn granted permission to each rail-



Figure 3. Maryland Avenue grade crossing of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad, showing a terminal-bound train, c. 1900. Library of Congress.

road to establish new passenger terminals. In the case of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the old, crowded Baltimore and Potomac depot on the Mall would be replaced by an enormous, up-to-date facility in the same location but upon a much expanded, fourteen-acre site (between Sixth and Seventh Streets). The existing depot tracks, which then crossed the Mall on Sixth Street, as seen in Figure 4, would be ripped out and rebuilt nearby on a massive, off-street elevated structure to be thrown across the Mall.¹⁵



Figure 4. View of the Mall, looking south on Sixth Street and showing the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad tracks, train shed, and terminal tower, c. 1900. Library of Congress.

Never before had anything so destructive to the Mall—or to L'Enfant's vision of it—been contemplated. Yet as sponsor of the legislation, Senator McMillan had wedded himself to the scheme for as long as the Pennsylvania Railroad refused to budge from its coveted position. Viewed in this light, the Centennial Avenue represented, above all, a grand approach street to the new terminal. Its curiously oblique alignment expressed hopes to offer travelers a direct route eastward toward Capitol Hill and westward toward the White House, making the depot, as one apologist explained in *The Inland Architect*, “so...easy of access as if it were the very pivotal point to all else” in the city.¹⁶

The Avenue possessed other virtues, however, all political. Because it lay almost entirely on public land, it would cost relatively little to build at a time when many Congressmen were groaning about the fiscal burden imposed by the Spanish-American War. It also offered building sites at a time of much clamor for new government structures. Finally, it terminated at the Potomac River, where the Cobb plan suggested a major plaza intended to win favor among advocates of a memorial bridge. All in all, Senator McMillan's “grand thoroughfare” bore the marks of a very clever move.¹⁷

Too clever, it turned out. McMillan's Centennial Avenue together with the Pennsylvania terminal scheme ignited the battle of plans, a struggle for power and influence over the future development of central Washington and even its outlying parks. The issues raised would not only shape the agenda of

the architects' intervention but, ultimately, of the Senate Park Commission itself. The novel comprehensiveness of that body's plan, in short, had its local roots in this hidden phase of the Centennial.

III. The Battle of Plans

McMillan's first antagonists were the U.S. Army engineers of the Chief of Engineers Office within the War Department, a group of men justly proud of their record in the physical care and upgrading of Washington throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁸ As early as January 29, 1900, before the Centennial Avenue scheme became known, the army engineers had responded to an official request by McMillan for their technical judgment of his railroad bills.¹⁹ They had more than replied; they had exploded. The most outraged among them was Col. Theodore S. Bingham, the impetuous and outspoken Superintendent of the Office of Buildings and Grounds, the body then responsible for the upkeep of most parks and government buildings in the capital. Mincing no words, Bingham denounced the terminal as a desecration of the Mall, a travesty upon L'Enfant's “noble plan,” and an “unpatriotic” rebuke to the memory of George Washington.²⁰ Such pointed remarks reflected not only Bingham's style but the engineers' formidable influence in Washington, both bureaucratically and politically.

The Centennial Avenue, once broached, further outraged the engineers. On March 5, less than two weeks after the February 21st meeting had endorsed the scheme, Col. Bingham submitted an alternative Mall plan to President McKinley. According to the *Washington Post*, he demanded the relocation of the proposed terminal to a position south of the Mall, the opening of a mid-Mall boulevard between Capitol Hill and the Washington Monument, and the placement of any new public buildings not along this roadway but along Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington's traditional thoroughfare. Whatever the President thought of these ideas then or seven weeks later when Bingham resubmitted them, his refusal to endorse them did not end the battle of plans.²¹

The Centennial Avenue had alarmed other Washingtonians, especially businessmen who had long favored the upgrading of Pennsylvania Avenue and the sizable wedge of land lying to its south, between that historic street and the Mall. Known today as the Federal Triangle, this area then disgraced respectable Washington. Cheap, shabby buildings filled the lots, and between 13th and 14th Streets, in a section once notorious as “Murder Bay,” prostitution flourished.²² By 1900 a solid consensus, tantamount to a plan, existed among downtown interests that the whores and derelict elements should be driven out by erecting new government buildings, through a kind of incremental slum renewal. Indeed, the then newly built city post office, a massive pile located on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue—and still standing today—was seen as contributing to this goal.²³ But McMillan's Centennial Avenue and the building sites he favored along it, rather than advancing this plan, lay far enough south to stir fears that Pennsylvania Avenue might become a “back street.”²⁴ Thus, the fate of the Triangle slum and its famous northern boundary became entangled in the battle and, ultimately, in the McMillan Plan.

The Centennial Avenue also impinged upon a park system scheme initiated by the Board of Trade in 1899. Following the lead of many American cities in the 1890s, the Board had contemplated a great chain of parks and parkways as proof of civic stature. Washington, it was claimed, might outdo any city in the world for it already possessed magnificent resources. These included Potomac Park, then a barren, 739-acre landfill built up since 1882 by the army engineers on the once malarial flats south and west of the Washington Monument, the National Zoological Park in the northwestern suburbs, the immense Rock Creek Park, just north of the Zoo, the park-like grounds of the U.S. Soldiers Home, and various Civil War hilltop fortifications, all of them loudly defended by veterans groups as historic sites. But none of these places, except for the Zoo, had been developed as yet for heavy public use, let alone linked by parkways.²⁵

As envisioned by the Board of Trade, a grand "ring street" would connect all of these places. Beginning at Capitol Hill, it would sweep westward through the Mall and Potomac Park, then loop through the northern reaches of the city, including the Civil War fort sites, and return to Capitol Hill. Another drive might begin in the same way but cross the Potomac and proceed as a "national boulevard along the Potomac to Mt. Vernon and the tomb of Washington."²⁶

Well before Senator McMillan had proposed his Centennial Avenue, his District Committee had aired these ideas and had even readied legislation authorizing a commission to plan the system.²⁷ But his proposed Avenue clearly impinged upon this initiative, raising awkward questions about how a "grand thoroughfare" could be sliced through the existing Mall parks for the sake of a railroad depot and still function as the starting point in the contemplated park chain. Also at stake was the free grant of an enlarged chunk of Mall parkland to the Pennsylvania Railroad by the proposed grade crossing legislation, to say nothing of the public works priorities in Washington generally.²⁸ The Board, however, sought to cooperate with McMillan to achieve its objectives.

Altogether the plans and counterplans forced into scrutiny by the proposed terminal yielded an extraordinary outcome: a broad if contentious battle over the future development of the nation's capital. Senators, Congressmen, army engineers, Centennial promoters, local boosters, the Washington press, and numerous civic leaders had joined the fray, debating—sometimes incisively, often not—basic questions of civic art, park system design, and even slum removal, all as if these were interrelated considerations. But could the opposing and divergent viewpoints be reconciled?

On May 14, Senator McMillan, acting on behalf of the Centennial organizers, introduced into the Senate a resolution that responded directly to this question. Cast in the form of an amendment to a civil appropriations act, it requested the President to appoint a panel of designers—an architect, a landscape architect, and a sculptor—who would, in association with the Chief of Engineers Office, devise a plan for the entire Mall-and-Triangle area and also for a "suitable connection" between Potomac Park and the Zoo.²⁹ These same experts would also design the enlargement of the White House. Here was a compromise which bowed to the army engineers by making them consultants, assimilated the slum renewal strategy of the downtown interests by including the Triangle, placated Congress-

men by providing an architect and other artists to select building sites, and appealed to park advocates by offering them a critical link in their park chain.

The amendment had one catch, however; its author Senator McMillan would dominate the appointments.³⁰ Almost certainly, whatever experts he favored would accept the proposed terminal and redesign the Centennial Avenue in more palatable form. Significantly, the engineers, reduced to advisors by this maneuver, would play second fiddle in the shaping of twentieth-century Washington. This represented a role reversal of historic dimensions not only for engineers in the nation's capital but for their position vis-a-vis the emerging design professions in the United States.

The final episode in the battle of plans took place in early June. Following McMillan's lead, the House of Representatives had enacted the same amendment with one fundamental difference: the army engineers, not a panel of design professionals, would carry out the work. In the House-Senate conference of June 6 that resolved the impasse, the pro-engineer version, slightly modified, prevailed, enabling the Chief of Engineers to assign none other than Col. Theodore S. Bingham to the tasks of redesigning the White House—a pet project for him—and of hiring a landscape architect to plan the Mall-and-Triangle area and the parkway link to the Zoo.³¹ All of a sudden the engineers had won the battle of plans—or, so it seemed.

Six months later as the Centennial, scheduled for December 12, drew near, the apparent balance of forces had not altered. In late October, Col. Bingham published his White House plans in the *Ladies Home Journal*, little sensing the alarm they would soon arouse among professional architects. On December 5, one week before the celebration, the War Department issued the new design for the Mall by Samuel Parsons, Jr., a New York landscape architect handpicked by Bingham for the job. The Parsons plan, although it bore his imprint, fulfilled the purposes of the engineers, banishing the railroad terminal from the Mall. "A lightning express," Parsons remarked, "is quite incompatible with a green garden and singing birds."³² Thus on Centennial Day the engineers looked as entrenched as ever, as if they would preside over the future of Washington just as they had for the past third of a century.

IV. The Politics of Architectural Intervention

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) assembled in Washington for its annual convention on Centennial Day, December 12, 1900, having rescheduled its meetings to coincide with the celebration. A basic political strategy lay behind this maneuver. That was to persuade Congress to entrust the planning of the ceremonial core of Washington to the nation's professional architects and artists, the same aesthetic elite that had made the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 and its dazzling Court of Honor a symbol of civic art aspirations in America. It was the heart of Washington with all its public buildings, monuments, and patriotic aura that lured the profession: almost precisely the same area jeopardized by the battle of plans. Indeed, the architects can be seen as reopening that struggle.

This fact alone suggests that the architects had plunged into a situation requiring political allies. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the second of the hidden origins of the McMillan

Plan took the form of a behind-the-scenes political bargain intended to advance their cause. How and why this came about, the nature of the bargain, and its implications for understanding the McMillan Plan and its novel comprehensiveness are our next concerns.

As is well known, the mastermind of the architects' intervention was Glenn Brown, the national secretary of the AIA.³³ No architect in America was better prepared to conceive and direct the assault. Over the previous decade, in the course of making an exhaustive study of the U.S. Capitol building, Brown had rediscovered the significance of the long-neglected L'Enfant plan as a still viable blueprint for the future of Washington. As early as 1894, he had launched a personal crusade to arouse the architectural profession to the goal of entrusting the nation's elite architects and artists with the redesign of the Mall in accord with L'Enfant's intentions. Even that early, he had opposed the army engineer corps for the job. That body, he had acidly remarked, had "never been accused of being artistic."³⁴

Brown also understood Congressional politics. A resident of Washington since 1880, the grandson of a U.S. Senator, and a habitué of the Capitol building, he had been the guiding spirit and lobbyist of the Public Art League since its inception in 1895 to agitate for the creation of a national fine arts commission.³⁵ Finally, as AIA secretary, Brown represented an organization already steeped in pressure-group tactics learned from a decades-long struggle to enact and implement legislation to upgrade the quality of federal building design. Only recently, in fact, the AIA had shifted its headquarters from New York to Washington to protect its hard-won gains.³⁶ By making Brown its secretary, the AIA had recruited not only an able functionary but also a first-rate watchdog.

When Senator McMillan unveiled his ill-fated Centennial Avenue on February 21, 1900, Brown proved his worth. Immediately recognizing its L'Enfant pedigree as meretricious, Brown persuaded the AIA leaders to stage their annual meeting as a protest against haphazard city building in Washington. He had in mind neither the design of the city as a whole nor its park system but what he called the "Grouping of Government Buildings, Landscape, and Statuary."³⁷

The "grouping" concept, it should be noted, was contemporary jargon for the civic art enthusiasm inspired by the Chicago World's Fair. Specifically, it referred to the formal arrangement of buildings in outdoor space. More broadly, it evoked the taste and style preferences then ascendant among the nation's elite architects and artists and their rich patrons, especially in the big urban centers of the Northeast. Dubbed the "Renaissance complex" by art historian Oliver Larkin, the new taste registered both a zeal for classic forms of architecture and for the Renaissance ideal of artistic collaboration among architects, sculptors, painters, and fine craftsmen.³⁸

The "grouping" idea, however, centered above all upon the artistic shaping of public space: city streets, public squares, the land around government buildings, and the like. In such settings, both the classicism and artistic collectivism of the "Renaissance complex" became symbolic of public, not private aspirations. A well ordered, well decorated group of official buildings, designed and built to the highest attainable standards, would symbolize order, civilization, and, above all, the new ethos of citizenship, public service, and civic duty then

prominent in political discourse, especially among the reform-minded. Public art would also celebrate the new pride of the American people in their recently attained stature as a world power.³⁹

The battle of plans determined much of Brown's approach to all these concerns. From March through June, 1900, Brown recruited his speakers as that struggle unfolded. And from July to November, he orchestrated their assault in light of the June 6th mandate of Congress to the engineers.⁴⁰ In mid-July, for example, he suggested that each speaker consult, among other documents, an article that he would soon publish in *The Architectural Review*.⁴¹ In it Brown would sketch a plan for the Mall and Triangle area and the parkway connection to the Zoo. This would enable each speaker, though personally ignorant of the battle of plans, to pick up where that struggle had left off. In October Brown implored one participant to advocate an architectural commission led by architects, landscape architects, and sculptors as the solution to Washington's problems. Bluntly he warned against any such body being "dominated in any way by the army engineers."⁴² Later that month, he alerted his speakers to Col. Bingham's piece in the *Ladies Home Journal*.⁴³

When the architects finally assembled, they heaped public abuse upon Bingham's White House scheme and, on December 13, staged their well publicized evening session on the design of the capital city.⁴⁴ For our purposes, it is the general thrust of the speakers' remarks, not the details of their proposals, that best reveals their intentions. Above all, they thought only in terms of the ceremonial core of Washington. For this area, everyone sought a formal, monumental, aesthetically unified composition of buildings, statuary, and public grounds, all styled in the classic manner and all rendered consistent with the L'Enfant plan as they understood it.⁴⁵

Carving scenes evocative of national power and high public purpose, they called to mind the European civic and palace vistas wrought by the eras of baroque taste and nineteenth-century monumentalism: the Champs Elysees in Paris, the Ringstrasse in Vienna, Unter den Linden in Berlin, the Plaza of St. Peters in Rome among many others. A redesigned Mall, as one speaker remarked, might readily evoke the "grandeur, power, and dignified magnificence which should mark the seat of government of a great and intensely active people."⁴⁶

Significantly, the speakers that evening focused exclusively upon the placement of government buildings, statuary, and other monumental structures within the heart of Washington. As their remarks makes clear, they had not journeyed to the capital to discuss the park system of the city or the suburban districts through which such a system might reach. Not even Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the spokesman for the nation's premier landscape architectural firm, had come to speak about such matters. The treatment of the Mall and its role as a setting for buildings were his major concerns. Like others who made remarks, he even ignored the parkway link to the Zoo.⁴⁷

Civic art, in short, expressed a vision of urban planning limited essentially to architectonic forms of design. It was, for all its complexity and sophistication, as circumscribed in its outlook as were the viewpoints that had long justified the creation of municipal park systems, the engineering of citywide sewerage and water supply, and the pursuit of still other limited-purpose forms of urban planning. In this basic respect, the speakers may be seen as still rooted in the specialized forms

of urban planning that had typified nineteenth-century attempts to reshape already established cities.

No sooner had the architects assembled than the politics of their intervention propelled them into the twentieth century. Abruptly and unexpectedly, as will be seen, they found themselves advocating a park system for Washington as a means of advancing civic art. As a consequence, two major, previously distinct forms of urban planning joined forces. This result would ultimately require the McMillan Plan to be as concerned about the far reaches of the city through which the park system would pass and the natural environment as about the center of the city and the built environment. Thus, it would anticipate and, by force of example, inculcate the comprehensiveness that became the conscious goal and root principle of much twentieth century urban planning.

The behind-the-scenes bargain that produced this outcome took place December 13, the second day of the convention. Five representatives of the AIA, appointed that day, met with Senator McMillan (or possibly with Charles Moore, his secretary) and, almost certainly, someone from the Board of Trade.⁴⁸ The Senator and the AIA shared antagonism toward the army engineers. Not only had the architects denounced Bingham, but Bingham had not cooperated with Brown before the AIA convention when Brown had solicited him for information about his White House design and the Parsons plan for the Mall.⁴⁹ Although Parsons' scheme was published a week before the architects gathered, they would ignore it at their public session on the design of the city held later that same day.

McMillan for his part still had his eyes riveted upon his grade crossing legislation, especially his bill authorizing the Mall terminal. Even as they met, his opponents in the House of Representatives were preparing to cite engineering criticism and the Parsons plan as justifications for its defeat.⁵⁰ McMillan needed the architects to sanction his claim to have the beauty of Washington at heart. More positively, McMillan respected architectural values. An admirer of Glenn Brown's massive study of the U.S. Capitol, he had previously arranged for its publication by the government. The architects, in turn, met the Senator's needs in one critical respect: they accepted, as a matter of realism, his terminal in the Mall.⁵¹

Once allied with Senator McMillan, the AIA had no choice but to embrace park planning. The reasons were elemental. Powerful as McMillan was in Washington affairs, his District Committee lacked authority over civic art. Control over building location, for example, belonged to the Senate Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, while jurisdiction over statutory lay with the Joint (Senate-House) Committee on the Library.⁵² But the Senator did have the power to initiate park legislation and, as noted, had already worked with the Board of Trade on this matter. Thus, the AIA agreed to address this issue and the Board of Trade, the chief promoter of the park system, agreed in turn to add the subjects of building and bridge placement to its publically stated goals for the city.⁵³ Ostensibly, McMillan had fathered a new coalition for the physical improvement of Washington.

The architects, however, did not fully grasp the ramifications of McMillan's prior dealings with the Pennsylvania Railroad. Only one week after striking the bargain, the usually savvy Brown was shocked to learn from newspaper reports that

McMillan's grade crossing legislation would authorize the construction of a massive railroad viaduct across the Mall, a provision that had been embedded in the proposed legislation from its outset. Apparently Brown had assumed that the tracks would cross the Mall at or beneath grade. Reacting swiftly, Brown began to rally architects in other cities to oppose this feature of grade crossing bills.⁵⁴ Almost as swiftly, however, he backed off. By late December it had been made clear to Brown that the viaduct was irrevocable and that the AIA must base its hopes for the Mall upon enactment of Joint Resolution No. 139, the measure which McMillan had introduced into the U.S. Senate on December 17 in fulfillment of his original understanding with the AIA.⁵⁵

Intended for passage of both houses of Congress, Joint Resolution No. 139 authorized the President of the United States to appoint a commission consisting of two architects and one landscape architect to "consider the subject of the location and grouping of public buildings and monuments... and the development and improvement of the park system" of the District. An appropriation of \$10,000 was sought for expenses.⁵⁶ By early January, the AIA had officially informed its chapters not to oppose the viaduct but to promote the passage of the resolution and to work "towards having the details of the track viaducts placed under the supervision of the proposed commission."⁵⁷

Joint Resolution No. 139 would never clear the Senate, let alone the House. According to Charles Moore, McMillan's trusted aide and personal secretary and, later, chronicler of these events, a "multitude of councillors" defeated the measure.⁵⁸ This explanation appears correct. Between December 17 and mid-January, 1901, at least two other commissions were proposed in the Senate and the House to address roughly the same tasks. Senator Hoar of Massachusetts, for example, called for a ten-member "advisory board of public works," a proposal soon favored by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. Another bill, introduced in the House, featured yet another approach to the task.⁵⁹

By early February, the architects had become alarmed. In the House, three additional bills had emerged, each designating sites for new buildings. All such measures, they realized, threatened their hopes to make the location of public structures the task of an elite commission of designers.⁶⁰ Unable to command support in either the House or the Senate, Joint Resolution No. 139 languished. By late February, the cause of the AIA and the Board of Trade appeared dim, if not lost.⁶¹

In Senator McMillan, however, the AIA possessed both a faithful and resourceful ally. With his railroad bills by then successfully enacted, he found a way to fulfill his end of the bargain. On March 8, during an executive session of the Senate held after the adjournment of Congress, he obtained last-minute passage of a resolution authorizing just his Committee to "report to the Senate plans for the development and improvement of the entire park system of the District of Columbia." Appropriate "experts" might be consulted and expenses defrayed from "the contingent fund of the Senate."⁶² These experts, once appointed, would become known as the U.S. Senate Park Commission or McMillan Commission, but their authority, it must be emphasized, rested upon a far more tenuous base than had been envisioned back in December. Furthermore, the new measure said nothing about public buildings and monuments.

Constance McLoughlin Green in her history of the federal city has castigated McMillan's action as a "politically egregious error."⁶³ Subsequent obstruction of the resulting plan by Speaker of the House, Joseph Cannon, she argues, stemmed from the Senator's failure to obtain concurrence from the House. But Green misconstrues the situation. Support from the House had never been forthcoming. The Senator had no other options but to invoke his real but limited power as Committee chairman to oversee park development. In reality, he honored his bargain with the AIA by playing virtually the only card remaining in hand. It was a deft, albeit a necessarily weak, move, yet a credit to McMillan as a man of his word. And as McMillan fully understood, the political circumstances under which he had acted now dictated caution.

V. Daniel H. Burnham: Catalyst

Thus far, we have examined how the events prior to the Senate Park Commission made possible the novel comprehensiveness of its influential report. The question now becomes: how did the Commission itself contribute to this outcome? The answer requires a fresh perspective that can not be found in any existing commentary upon the plan. Briefly stated, it is that the Commission exceeded its instructions, largely because of Daniel H. Burnham, Chairman of the Commission. Not only might that body have submitted a less audacious scheme, but Senator McMillan explicitly instructed it to do so. But what emerged bore an air of ideality, grandeur, and finality, especially with respect to the ceremonial core of Washington. All commentators have recognized this end result, but none has grasped its sheer presumptuousness. What follows, therefore, is not a history of the Commission but a highlighting of its audacity, especially on the part of Burnham, who catalyzed the events thus far traced. His boldness, in short, provides the final key to grasping the unique comprehensiveness of the McMillan Plan.

On March 19, 1901, Senator McMillan and Senator Jacob H. Gallinger of New Hampshire, acting as a subcommittee of the Senate District Committee, held an informal hearing with representatives of the AIA to discuss, as McMillan put it, the "improvement of the park system" and, "incidentally," the placement of public buildings. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., also attended.⁶⁴ Everyone present agreed that three experts should be appointed, but no one knew just what sort of plan they should formulate.

As the hearing proceeded, however, a very definite objective emerged: the Commission should devise a "preliminary plan" as distinct from a "matured one."⁶⁵ Because the resulting scheme would be tentative, it could then be negotiated through the Senate and House committees that had jurisdiction over parks, buildings, and statuary—or, through a joint committee representing all these bodies.⁶⁶ A final amended plan would be developed later. In light of the tenuous mandate McMillan had won for the Commission, this cautious, consensus-building strategy made excellent political sense. As Olmsted privately noted, McMillan wanted a "comprehensive scheme" but feared that "it might be turned down by the other Committees if it were made too complete and pushed too far."⁶⁷

The Commission established to fulfill this understanding included Daniel H. Burnham, the Chicago architect famous

for masterminding the construction of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, Charles F. McKim, the New York architect who epitomized the "Renaissance complex" in the building arts, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., son of the nation's foremost landscape architect.⁶⁸ Later, the eminent sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens became a fourth Commissioner. In effect, the design team of the Chicago Fair had been reconstituted. Everyone but Olmsted, who was only twenty-nine years old when appointed to the Commission, had had major roles in shaping that spectacle. Even Olmsted, a stand-in of sorts for his ailing father, had worked at the Fair long enough to recall it ever afterward as a high point in his professional life.⁶⁹

At the March 19 hearing both Senators made clear that these experts should avoid heavy expenses. "A scheme of extravagance," Gallinger had warned, "...would very likely defeat the purposes we have in view."⁷⁰ Both he and McMillan welcomed a "preliminary plan" as avoiding this hazard. When Burnham and Olmsted first met, on March 22, they foresaw \$22,600 as their "maximum expense," but McMillan favored less, informing them that costs should run "between \$15,000 and \$20,000" and then publicizing a still lower sum, reported by the *Washington Post* as "about \$10,000."⁷¹ These dollar figures provide benchmarks for judging how far the Commission would soon exceed its instructions.

From April 6, when the Commission first assembled as an official body, to June 13 when it departed for Europe on its famous study-tour, Burnham imprinted his large sense of mission upon his fellow Commissioners. Repeatedly, he drew upon his World's Fair experience.⁷² Although all the Commissioners brought to the task a spirit of service and teamwork instilled in them by the Fair, only Burnham had held direct, administrative responsibility for coordinating the entire, stupendous undertaking, from dredging operations through building layout to lighting and policing. Largeness of view, executive ability, and skill in the functional designing of great commercial structures had also characterized his private work.⁷³ Almost inevitably, Burnham became head of the Commission and inspired his fellow Commissioners to perceive the nation's capital as virtually another exposition, to be addressed as an analogously malleable whole.⁷⁴

No surviving document better illustrates Burnham's breadth of outlook than a hurried list that he mailed to McKim, Olmsted, and Moore early in May. Every item on the list ought to be reviewed, he suggested. Under the heading of "Transportation," for example, he entered "Railways, Depots, Viaducts, Electric Lines, Cable Lines, Horse Lines, Cab Service" and even "Automobiles" and "Bicycles." At one point he focused upon residential areas, asking whether building height and setback requirements might be proposed—regulatory concepts not be associated with city planning in the United States for another ten years. Elsewhere, he suggested that the Commission discuss "methods for heating and lighting, for distribution of water and sewerage, for fire protection, policing and care of the insane and criminal classes." For a man often accused of Hausmannic pretensions, Burnham showed a keen eye for detail, by raising questions about plantings along transit lines, about noise and smoke pollution, about the cleanliness of depots and of "cabs, wagons, of drivers and employees," and even about appropriate uniforms for street vendors, elevator operators, and various public servants.⁷⁵

Although Burnham revealed a play of mind beyond what many detractors have allotted him, it is his well known success in extricating the Pennsylvania Railroad from the Mall that emboldened the Commission to go beyond McMillan's instructions and even enlist the Senator himself in their cause. As is already apparent from previous discussion of the battle of plans, the proposed new terminal in the Mall represented the linchpin to the replanning of Washington. At the point the Commission first officially met, April 6, that pin appeared more firmly in place than ever. Nearly two months before, Congress had enacted the long-agitated grade crossing legislation and President McKinley had signed it, on February 12. The new terminal, McMillan told his Commissioners, must be regarded as "a fixture upon the Mall."⁷⁶

Burnham refused to accept this reality. Instead, he maneuvered in a fashion hitherto never recorded. Approaching McKim and swearing him to secrecy, Burnham confided that he, Burnham, might well become the architect of that very terminal. With his in mind, the two men together plotted its removal from the Mall. Thus, on May 20 when Burnham arrived at the Philadelphia headquarters of Pennsylvania Railroad empire, hoping for the assignment, he did not come as a passive supplicant. He brought rough plans for an alternative, off-Mall site. In an excited letter to McKim written immediately afterwards, Burnham reported that President Alexander Cassatt of the Pennsylvania system and his chief engineers "had no idea of the development we had worked out" and were still thinking of "the old location." "The new idea," he made clear, "has been received with much more open-mindedness than I had hope of." In fact, Burnham later told McKim that the railroad officers also agreed that same day to halt land purchases "for the old scheme," at least until a more detailed proposal for "the new location" could be presented.⁷⁷

The special contribution of Burnham and the Commissioners to the comprehensiveness of their report pivots upon this breakthrough. By seizing the linchpin to virtually the entire complex of events that had given rise to the Commission, Burnham created a new basis for replanning the core of Washington. It was as if L'Enfant himself had won a second chance. Only this dazzling prospect, combined with Burnham's celebrated persuasiveness and the ready support of McKim and Olmsted, explains why McMillan, for all his earlier qualms about costs, soon agreed to expend an additional \$13,000 to hire George Carroll Curtis, a Boston model builder, to construct two three-dimensional representations of central Washington, one to show existing conditions and the other the area as replanned.⁷⁸ A preliminary scheme would not have justified such a lavish dramatization.

The fact that McMillan consented to this action before the Commission departed for Europe is indication enough that its members ventured abroad already knowing that they were aiming for something of grand and enduring worth. Even Moore, who accompanied the Commission, would later recall having warned the designers while still on shipboard that their "ideas were too overpowering to receive consideration in Congress," only to be "silenced if not then convinced by Burnham's downright assertion that it was the business of the Commission to make the very finest plans their minds could conceive."⁷⁹

The Commission may also have known that in their absence Senator McMillan would follow up Burnham's initiative by inviting President Cassatt of the Pennsylvania Railroad to his vacation home in Manchester, New Hampshire. Not only did this event take place, but as Moore recalled the story off the record years later, the two men had settled the much vexed terminal question while playing a game of golf.⁸⁰

According to Moore, Cassatt agreed to vacate the Pennsylvania Railroad's claims to the Mall if Senator McMillan would persuade Congress to meet the increased expenses involved. Cassatt's change of mind about the terminal was made possible by a recent decision of the Pennsylvania Railroad to merge the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad, which it had owned for some time and whose operating rights in the Mall had seemed so entrenched, with Washington's other railroad, the Baltimore and Ohio (B. & O.). Under these new circumstances, Cassatt indicated his willingness to erect a union station for the entire city, northeast of the Mall, on the site granted to the B. & O. by the recently enacted grade crossing legislation. Even before departing for Europe, Burnham had begun discussions of this possibility with Cassatt.⁸¹

Many factors had contributed to the outcome, especially the Pennsylvania Railroad's merger decision, but Burnham's initiative in May, backed fully by McKim, had clearly come at an opportune time. No less an authority than Senator McMillan credited Burnham as the decisive figure in this crucial development.⁸² When Cassatt later met with Burnham in London in mid-July and informed him of the decision, Burnham was justifiably elated. The Commissioners' hopes to frame "the very finest plans their minds could conceive" had been vindicated.

This aspiration, of course, cost great sums of money, far in excess of the original expectations. Heretofore never published, these expenses lie buried in the records of the Contingent Fund of the U.S. Senate. The entries, when summed up, reveal that payments to George Curtis, whose models the Commission prized so highly, reached nearly \$24,500, an extraordinary sum for that era. Disbursements to McKim, chiefly for draftsmen to work up the Mall design and for artists to illustrate the results, exceeded \$17,000. The expenses of Burnham, who concentrated mainly on negotiations over the terminal, ran to over \$1,500. Those of Olmsted, who had direct responsibility for the design of the overall park system, and of his draftsman, James G. Langdon, totaled almost \$3,700. Moore's claims were almost \$6,100. All told, the expenses recorded by the Contingent Fund and clearly attributable to the Commission ran to \$53,621.66—as against the \$10,000 once publicly estimated and the \$20,000 maximum originally prescribed by McMillan.⁸³

At one point, shortly after the return of the Commission from Europe, McMillan expressed alarm to Moore over Curtis' mounting fees.⁸⁴ One record, preserved in McKim's papers, indicates that the Senator had to advance \$12,000 of personal funds, eventually reimbursed, to keep the Commission going. Still later, news of the cost overrun shocked the Senate into placing strict limits upon future committee expenditures from the Contingent Fund.⁸⁵ The Commission's trip abroad, it must be realized, was a novelty at that time.

The completed scheme, publically displayed at the Corcoran Gallery in mid-January, 1902, featured two broad components.

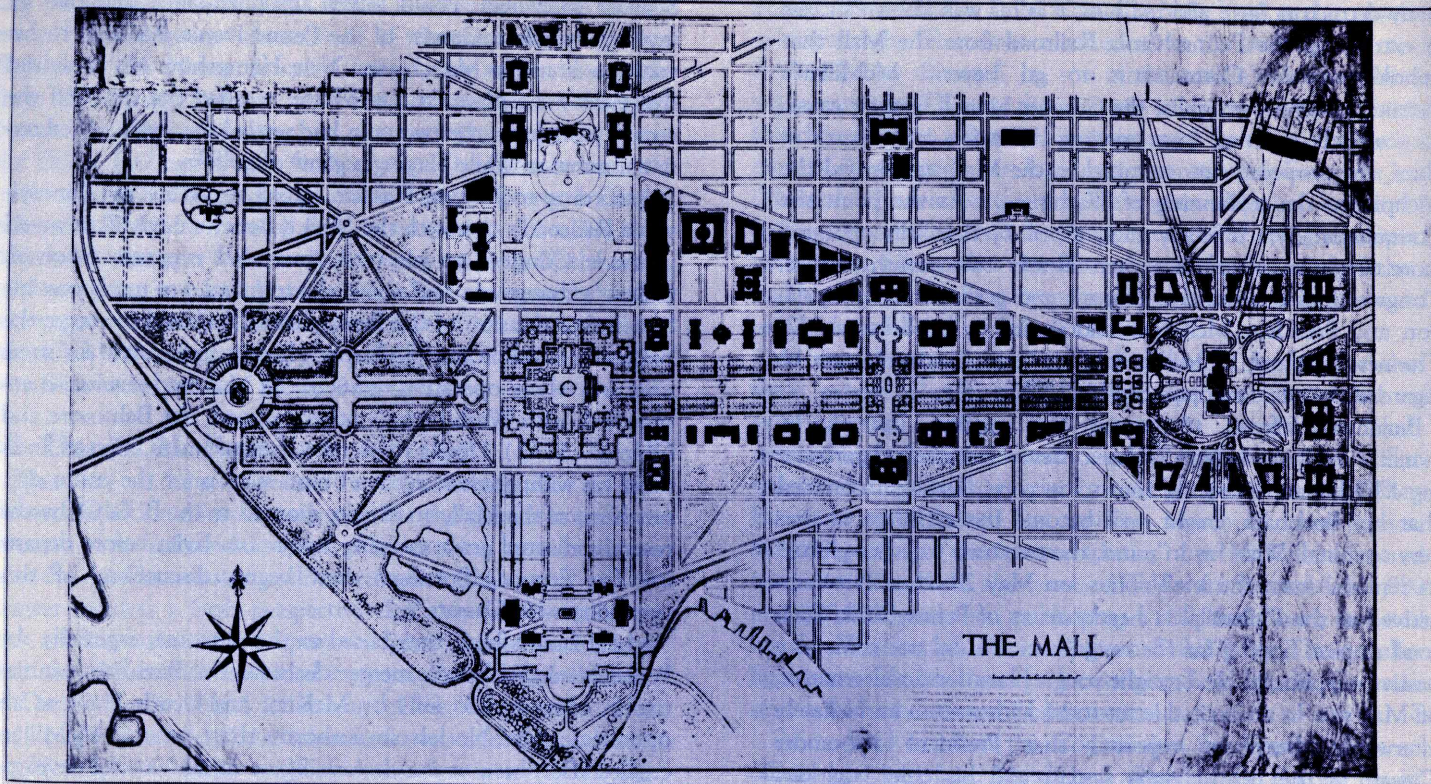


Figure 5. Design for the Ceremonial Core of Washington, the McMillan Plan, 1901. National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Plans and Studies: Washington and Vicinity* (1929).

First, it addressed the ceremonial core of Washington, especially the kite-shaped expanse anchored by the U.S. Capitol to the east, the Lincoln Memorial site to the west, the White House and Lafayette Park to the north, and a formal building group to be constructed adjacent to the Tidal Basin to the south, as seen in Figure 5. Within this area the Commission imposed the civic art ideas then ascendant among American architects. They also addressed the issues raised by the events preceding the appointment of the Commission: the placement of the Potomac River bridge, the location of the Pennsylvania Railroad terminal, and the fate of the Triangle slum, all of which added to the complexity of their endeavor.⁸⁶

Second, the plan outlined an extensive park system, shown in Figure 6, that reached through the outer limits of the District and well beyond in the case of a proposed "national highway" to Mt. Vernon. Olmsted incorporated many of the ideas promoted by the Board of Trade, veterans, and other groups. But he went much further, proposing a state-of-the-art system based upon his firm's national experience and the Commission's European tour. Among the ideas within this portion of the plan were suggestions for beginning a system of neighborhood parks, for constructing an immense quay along the Potomac near Georgetown, for preserving the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal as a scenic-recreational amenity, and for sanitary reclamation of the notoriously malarial Anacostia flats as an enormous recreational water park.⁸⁷

Altogether, the civic art ideals and park system goals of the Commission, once blended with each other and with the local agenda established by the events preceding the creation of the Commission, yielded a report of unprecedented sweep and complexity. None of this would have happened but for the hid-

den origins of the McMillan Commission: the battle of plans, the behind-the-scenes bargain between the AIA and Senator McMillan, and the catalytic role of Burnham, whose leadership enabled the Commission to transcend its original instructions. The comprehensiveness achieved as a result of these developments, would, as suggested at the beginning, leave an indelible imprint on our national capital and upon the history of urban planning in the United States.

The process by which this outcome was realized, it may be noted in closing, also stemmed from the hidden origins of the plan itself. In effect, the Commission had embraced one horn of a then insoluble dilemma: whether to pursue the betterment of Washington by means of a politically sound or, alternatively, an artistically ideal program. To have devised a preliminary scheme open to amendment by a host of Congressional committees, would have almost certainly yielded a mediocre, if politically feasible result. Rejecting this horn of the dilemma, the Commissioners had opted for an idealistic solution. Accordingly, they had little choice but to glorify their work, devise impressive models, hire the best illustrators, and indeed impart to their effort an aura of grand finality and aesthetic authority.

This horn of the dilemma posed substantial risks. For years, the McMillan Plan sat poorly with Congress, its idealism and presumptuousness offering an easy target, especially for members of the House of Representatives who righteously claimed not to have been consulted.⁸⁸ The sheer cost of the Commission at a time of stringency in District affairs also hurt. Enemies watched from the sidelines, waiting opportunities to subvert the scheme. Little wonder that when the AIA, not fully comprehending these repercussions, pressed Senator

McMillan to establish a permanent commission, he steadfastly counseled against action, fearing that such a move might crystallize the opposition.⁸⁹

Only a gradualist strategy offered an escape from these complications. Senator McMillan understood this if his actions are any cue. The task, he realized, was not to push the whole plan all at once but to make it stick, first here, then there. Before his unexpected death in August, 1902, the Senator took the first such step, obtaining legislation that placed the Union Station exactly where the Commission had wanted it. Subsequent battles, especially over the location of the Department of Agriculture Building in the Mall and the choice of a memorial to Abraham Lincoln, jeopardized the plan for over a decade, imposing a heavy burden on its advocates to defend and promote it, year in and year out.

Without question, this process kept the McMillan Plan alive as a vital force, both locally and nationally. Rarely has a city

plan with such tenuous official standing enjoyed such success. Persistence, friends in high office, widespread public support, clever lobbying, and not a little luck partly account for this outcome. But just as important, and perhaps more, was the fact that it was no little plan that had emerged in Washington. "Big" enough and "noble" enough to stir "men's blood," it became in the words of the planning motto so often identified with Daniel H. Burnham, "a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency"—capable indeed of shaping the nation's capital and inspiring a national planning movement.⁹⁰

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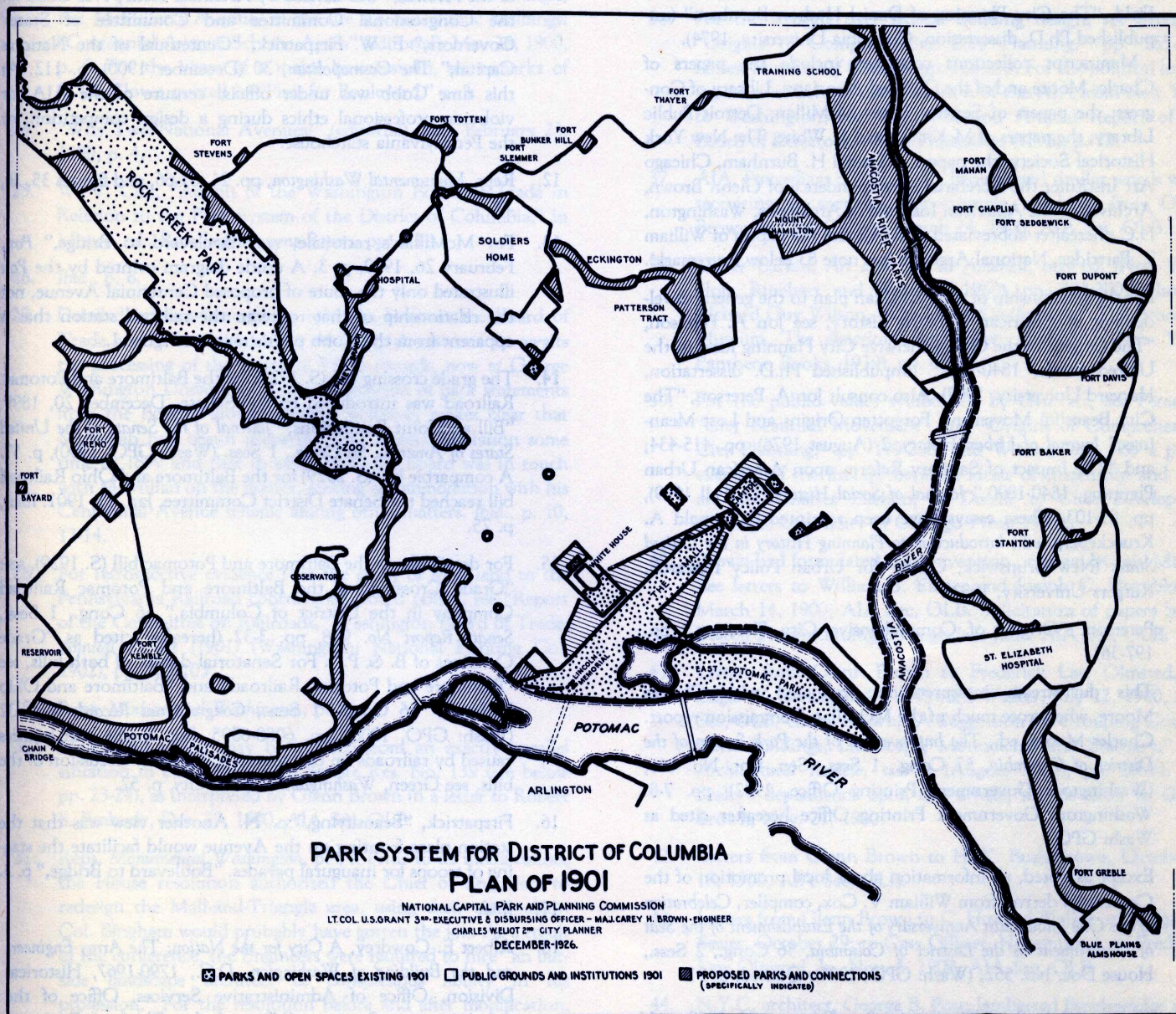


Figure 6. Existing Public Spaces and Proposed Park System for the District of Columbia, McMillan Plan, 1901. National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Work of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission* (1928).

1. All research on the McMillan Plan must deal with its most intimately knowledgeable recorder: Charles Moore, *Daniel H. Burnham: Architect, Planner of Cities* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921) and *The Life and Times of Charles Follen McKim* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929). Moore's shortcomings lie less in the erroneous statements that he occasionally makes than in his role as an apologist. He leaves much unsaid.
Important secondary works include Thomas S. Hines, *Burnham of Chicago: Architect and Planner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); John W. Reps, *Monumental Washington: The Planning and Development of the Capital Center* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Frederick Gutheim and Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Federal City: Plans & Realities* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976); Frederick Gutheim, *Worthy of the Nation: The History of Planning for the National Capital* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1977); Glenn Brown, *Memories, 1880-1930: A Winning Crusade to Revive George Washington's Vision of a Capital City* (Washington: W. F. Roberts Co., 1931); Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) and Cynthia R. Field, "The City Planning of Daniel Hudson Burnham" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1974).
Manuscript collections consulted include the papers of Charles Moore and of the Olmsted Associates, Library of Congress; the papers of Senator James McMillan, Detroit Public Library; the papers of McKim, Mead & White, The New York Historical Society; the papers of Daniel H. Burnham, Chicago Art Institute; the secretarial correspondence of Glenn Brown, Archives of the American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C. (hereafter abbreviated as AIA); and the papers of William T. Partridge, National Archives (see note 83 below for remark).
2. For the relationship of the McMillan plan to the general development of American planning history, see Jon A. Peterson, "The Origins of the Comprehensive City Planning Ideal in the United States, 1840-1911" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1967). Also consult Jon A. Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," *Journal of Urban History*, 2 (August 1976), pp. 415-434; and "The Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890," *Journal of Social History*, 13 (Fall 1979), pp. 83-103. These essays have been reprinted in Donald A. Krueckeberg, ed., *Introduction to Planning History in the United States* (New Brunswick, Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University, 1983).
3. Peterson, "Origins of Comprehensive City Planning," pp. 197-361.
4. This dual-stream interpretation originated with Charles Moore, who wrote much of the McMillan Commission report. Charles Moore, ed., *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia*, 57 Cong., 1 Sess., Sen. Rpt. No. 166, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), pp. 7-8. Washington: Government Printing Office hereafter cited as Wash: GPO.
5. Except as noted, all information about local promotion of the Centennial derives from William V. Cox, compiler, *Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Establishment of the Seat of Government in the District of Columbia*, 56 Cong., 2 Sess., House Doc. No. 552, (Wash: GPO, 1901). Quoted, p. 21.
6. "Scene of Splendor," *The Evening Star*, February 22, 1900, p. 11 (hereafter cited as *Star*).
7. "Memorial Bridge, Too," *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1900, p. 10 (hereafter cited as *Post*). "Centennial Avenue" (editorial), *Star*, February 22, 1900, p. 4.
8. Senator McMillan was appointed to the Senate Centennial Committee, February 16, 1900, replacing Senator Hoar of Massachusetts, who had resigned January 4. See "December Selected," *Star*, February 21, 1900, p. 1. Senator Hoar would later oppose, at least indirectly, McMillan's attempts to establish a commission to replan Washington. See below, note 24, and letter from Glenn Brown to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., January 23, 1901, AIA Secretary, Outgoing Letter Books, Archives of the American Institute of Architects, Washington (hereafter cited as AIA Sec, OLB).
9. "December Selected," *Star*, February 21, 1900, p. 1.
10. "Centennial Avenue" (editorial), *Star*, February 22, 1900, p. 4.
11. For Cobb's role, see F. W. Fitzpatrick, "Beautifying the Nation's Capital," *The Inland Architect and News Record*, 35 (March 1900), pp. 13-14. "This scheme," Fitzpatrick later said of the Avenue, "was devised by Architect Henry Ives Cobb for the Congressional Committee and Committee of States' Governors," F. W. Fitzpatrick, "Centennial of the Nation's Capital," *The Cosmopolitan*, 30 (December 1900), p. 112. At this time Cobb was under official censure of the AIA for violating professional ethics during a design competition for the Pennsylvania statehouse.
12. Reps, *Monumental Washington*, pp. 21, 61-66, and figures 35, 36, 38.
13. For McMillan's rationale, see "Boulevard to Bridge," *Post*, February 26, 1900, p. 3. A crude diagram printed by the *Post* illustrated only the route of proposed Centennial Avenue, not the relationship of that route to the railroad station that is apparent from the Cobb plan shown in Figure 1.
14. The grade crossing bill (S. 1929) for the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad was introduced to the Senate, December 20, 1899. "Bill and Joint Resolutions," *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America*, 56 Cong., 1 Sess. (Wash: GPO, 1900), p. 57. A comparable bill (S. 2329) for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad bill reached the Senate District Committee, Jan. 11, 1901. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
15. For details about the Baltimore and Potomac bill (S. 1929), see: "Grade Crossings of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Company in the District of Columbia," 56 Cong., 1 Sess., *Senate Report No. 928*, pp. 3-32 (hereafter cited as "Grade Crossings of B. & P."). For Senatorial debate of both bills, see "Baltimore and Potomac Railroad" and "Baltimore and Ohio Railroad," 56 Cong., 1 Sess., *Congressional Record*, Vol. 32 (Wash: GPO, 1900), pp. 6088-6095. For deaths and injuries caused by railroads on city streets and general discussion of the bills, see Green, *Washington: Capital City*, p. 52.
16. Fitzpatrick, "Beautifying," p. 14. Another view was that the station plaza fronting on the Avenue would facilitate the staging of troops for inaugural parades. "Boulevard to Bridge," p. 3.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Albert E. Cowdrey, *A City for the Nation: The Army Engineers and the Building of Washington, D.C., 1790-1967*, Historical Division, Office of Administrative Services, Office of the Administrative Services, Office of the Chief of Engineers (Wash: GPO, 1979).

19. "Report of the War Department on the Bill (S. 1929) to Provide for Eliminating Certain Road Crossings on the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad" is included within "Grade Crossings of B. & P.," pp. 18-21.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21. Lansing H. Beach, the engineer member of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, had worked with Senator McMillan on the railroad bill and supported it fully. *Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia*, in "Grade Crossings of B. & P.," pp. 9-17.
21. "Plan for Boulevard," *Post*, March 6, 1900, p. 2; "Plans for New Avenue," *Post*, April 29, 1900, p. 20.
22. Charles Moore, "Notes on the Parks and their Connections," in Charles Moore, ed., *Park Improvement Papers* (Wash: GPO, 1903), p. 94. For sobriquet of "Murder Bay," see William M. Maury, *Alexander 'Boss' Shepherd and the Board of Public Works*, GW Washington Studies No. 3 (Washington: George Washington University, 1975), p. 31.
23. For the slum renewal role of the post office, see Moore, "Notes on the Parks," p. 94. The *Star* forcefully argued for the triangle, not McMillan's Avenue, as the site for new public buildings: "Centennial Avenue Scheme Again" (editorial), May 26, 1900, p. 6. For the views of a major businessman, see remarks of C. C. Glover quoted in "Plan for Boulevard," p. 2.
24. "Why Two National Avenues?" (editorial), *Star*, February 23, 1900, p. 4.
25. W. V. Cox, "Action of the Washington Board of Trade in Relation to the Park System of the District of Columbia," in Moore, ed., *Park Improvement Papers*, pp. 5-21.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
27. Detailed information on the relations between the Board of Trade and Senator McMillan on the park system idea awaits the processing of the Board of Trade records, now at George Washington University. Cox's compilation of park statements from the Board's annual reports, however, makes clear that McMillan had begun preparing park system legislation some time in 1899 and that in early 1900, the Board was in touch with McMillan on the matter, seeking accommodation with his Centennial Avenue scheme among other matters. *Ibid.*, p. 10, 13-14.
28. For retrospective evidence that the grant of Mall land to the Pennsylvania Railroad contravened Board policy, see "Report of the Committee on Railroads," Washington Board of Trade, *Annual Report (1901)* (Washington: National Printing Co., 1902), pp. 102-103.
29. Reys, *Monumental Washington*, p. 74.
30. McMillan's power may be inferred from an exactly parallel situation in connection with Senate Res. No. 139 (see below pp. 23-24), as interpreted by Glenn Brown in a letter to Robert S. Peabody, Dec. 29, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB.
31. Reys, *Monumental Washington*, p. 74. Prior to its modification, the House resolution authorized the Chief of Engineers to redesign the Mall-and-Triangle area, using their own talent. Col. Bingham would probably have gotten the job. As a result of the conference, the Engineers were required to hire "an outside landscape architect of conspicuous ability in his profession." For the resolution before and after modification, see Cox, *Celebration*, pp. 203, 320. For a reference to McMillan's setback, see Moore, *Burnham*, Vol. 1, p. 135.
32. "Plans for Treatment of that Portion of the District of Columbia South of Pennsylvania Avenue and North of B Street SW., and for a Connection between Potomac and Zoological Parks," 56 Cong., 2 Sess., *House Doc. No. 135*, p. 8. Reprinted by Cox, *Celebrations*, pp. 324-328. The drafting of the Parsons Plan was done by two architects, William T. Partridge and Henry Bacon, both of whom would later work with Charles McKim upon the design of the Mall for the McMillan Commission. See William T. Partridge, "McMillan Commission: Personal Recollections," p. 20, Partridge papers, Record Group No. 328, National Archives (hereafter cited as Partridge papers).
33. Reys, *Monumental Washington*, pp. 82-83.
34. Glenn Brown, "The Selection of Sites for Federal Buildings," *The Architectural Review*, 3 (1894), pp. 27-29. Quote, p. 28.
35. "Glenn Brown," *American Architect*, 141 (June, 1932), p. 44. Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956), pp. 81-82. For more detail, see Brown, *Memories*.
36. For the struggle over federal building design, see Peterson, "Origins of Comprehensive City Planning," pp. 155-158; Hines, *Burnham of Chicago*, pp. 126-133. For the political lobbying motives behind the relocation of the AIA from New York to Washington, see "Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Directors," AIA, *Proceedings* (1898), p. 12.
37. AIA, *Proceedings* (1900), p. 92. Brown used similar words when recruiting his speakers. For example, see letter from Glenn Brown to Cass Gilbert, March 24, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB.
38. Oliver Larkin, *Art and Life in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 293-300. Also see Richard Guy Wilson, "The Great Civilization," The Brooklyn Museum, *The American Renaissance, 1876-1917* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), pp. 11-25.
39. For the public values symbolized by civic art, see Peterson, "City Beautiful Movement" and "Origins of Comprehensive City Planning," pp. 199-206; and Wilson, *ibid.* For a prime example of the linkage between ideals of citizenship and civic art, see Charles Zueblin, *A Decade of Civic Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1905).
40. Brown had formulated the convention program by mid-March. See letters to William S. Eames and Joseph C. Hornblower, March 14, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB. Solicitation of papers began March 24, continuing through late June. AIA Sec. OLB.
41. Letters from Glenn Brown to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Edgar V. Seeler, and C. Howard Walker, July 12, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB, Glenn Brown, "A Suggestion for Grouping Government Buildings; Landscape, Monuments and Statuary," *The Architectural Review*, n.s. 2 (August 1901), pp. 89-94. For Seeler's dependence upon this article, see his letter to Glenn Brown, Nov. 21, 1900.
42. Letters from Glenn Brown to H. K. Bush-Brown, October 9, 18, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB.
43. Letters from Glenn Brown to C. Howard Walker and Edgar V. Seeler, October 29; to Cass Gilbert, November 3; to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Nov. 6, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB.
44. N.Y.C. architect, George B. Post, lambasted Bingham for making the White House into "a banquet for the Philistines," "A Residence for the President," *Post*, December 15, 1900, p. 6. St.

- Louis architect, William S. Eames, warned that "the entire machinery of the army lobby" was working to obtain the White House job. "Capital's Chief Need," *Post*, December 14, 1900, p. 2, 9.
45. Glenn Brown, compiler, *Papers Relating to the Improvement of the City of Washington, District of Columbia*, 56 Cong., 2 Sess., Sen. Doc. No. 94, (Wash: GPO, 1901). My analysis of the evening session viewpoints is based strictly upon the papers actually given on that occasion, not those of Cass Gilbert, Paul J. Pelz, and Goerge O. Totten, Jr., which were added later to this publication. Pelz's loyalty to picturesque design for the Mall, for example, did not figure in the session. For a list of those who actually spoke, see AIA, *Proceedings* (1900), p. 92. For Pelz's plan, see Repts, *Monumental Washington*, p. 87.
 46. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Landscape in Connection with Public Buildings," *ibid.*, p. 34.
 47. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.
 48. For the December 13 meeting, see AIA, *Proceedings* (1900), pp. 47-8, 113. The presence of the Board of Trade is inferred from the fact that it voted the very next day (December 14) to adopt the policies set the previous day. See Cox, "Action of Washington Board of Trade in Relation to Park System," p. 17. The AIA convention created a special committee to draft legislation to carry out the ideas agreed upon at the December 13 meeting: AIA, *Proceedings* (1900), pp. 113, 120-21. This committee met with Charles Moore at the Library of Congress, December 17, and agreed upon Joint Res. No. 139, which Senator McMillan submitted to the Senate that day. For this meeting, see "The Commission on Parks and the Future Grouping of Government Buildings in Washington City," AIA, *Quarterly Bulletin*, 2 (April, 1901), pp. 6, 8; Letter from Glenn Brown to J. B. N. Wyatt, December 17, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB; and Board of Directors Meeting, January 7, 1901, in AIA Minutes, 1885-1901, AIA Archives, Washington, D.C.
 49. Letters from Col. Theodore A. Bingham to Glenn Brown, November 13, 15, 1900. AIA Secretary Office Files, Incoming Correspondence, AIA Archives, Washington (hereafter cited as AIA Sec, IC). For similar responses by Bingham to other information requests by Brown, see letters from Bingham to Brown, July 3 and October 1, 1900, *ibid.*
 50. "Grade Bills in Committee," *Post*, December 12, 1900, p. 4; "To Save the Mall," *Star*, December 15, 1900.
 51. See Mall-plan drawings accompanying Brown, compiler, *Papers Relating to Improvement of Washington*. Brown's Mall design, for example, allocated space to the railroad and featured a central boulevard running the length of the Mall and passing over the tracks. Repts reproduces Brown's design and that of Edgar V. Seeler in *Monumental Washington*, pp. 83, 88. Seeler's design addresses the railroad in the same general ways. His plan is especially revealing of the architects' preconvention views toward the railroad because Brown personally escorted Seeler over the Mall grounds before Seeler wrote his convention paper. See letters from Edgar V. Seeler to Glenn Brown, October 30, November 21, 1900, AIA Sec, IC.
 52. "Informal Hearing before the Subcommittee of the Committee on the District of Columbia, United States Senate," Moore, ed., *Park Improvement Papers*, p. 68.
 53. Cox, "Action of Washington Board of Trade in Relation to Park System," p. 17.
 54. Letters from Glenn Brown to William A. Boring and Frank Miles Day, December 20, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB. For Brown's assumption about how the railroad would cross the Mall, see note 51 above.
 55. Letter from Glenn Brown to Robert S. Peabody, December 29, 1900, AIA Sec, OLB. For Joint Res. No. 139, also see note 48 above.
 56. "A Commission for the Artistic Development of Washington," *The American Architect*, 71 (February 9, 1901), pp. 47-48.
 57. Letter from Glenn Brown to G. O. Totten, Jr., January 7, 1901, AIA Sec, OLB.
 58. Moore, McKim, p. 183.
 59. For Sen. Hoar's scheme, see "To Beautify the District," *Star*, December 17, 1900. For the Commissioners' support of a ten-member commission, see "Control by Permits," *Post*, January 16, 1901, p. 12. For the House measure, see "District in Congress," *Star*, January 15, 1901, p. 4.
 60. Letters from Glenn Brown to William A. Boring, February 6, 1901, and to Robert S. Peabody, February 11, 1901, AIA Sec, OLB. Letter from Robert S. Peabody to Glenn Brown, February 18, 1901, AIA Sec, IC.
 61. After February 6, 1901, Glenn Brown's efforts to arouse support among architects for Joint Res. No. 139 came to a near standstill. See letters by Glenn Brown, February 6 to March 8, 1901, AIA Sec, OLB.
 62. For the resolution, see Charles Moore, ed., *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia*, 57 Cong., 1 Sess., Sen. Rpt. No. 166 (Wash: GPO, 1902), p. 7. For Senate enactment, see "The Commission on Parks and the Future Grouping of Public Buildings," pp. 6-8; and Moore, *Burnham*, Vol. 1, p. 137.
 63. Green, *Washington: Capital City*, p. 138.
 64. "Informal Hearing," pp. 67, 70. Because other Senate and House committees had jurisdiction over buildings and statuary, Sen. McMillan expressed "a little difficulty about going on with the public building feature of the matter." *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 65. *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 76, 78. Olmsted originated the idea of developing a "preliminary plan," basing his suggestion upon the procedures devised by Charles Eliot in 1892 to project the metropolitan park system of Boston. To create a vast system in a short period of time, Eliot had omitted specific design detail, identifying instead a variety of desirable sites intended to fulfill a broadly conceived open space program. "Report of the Board of Metropolitan Park Commissioners," Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts House Dec. No. 150* (Boston, 1893). Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 327-330.
 66. At the end of the hearing, McMillan summed up: "I think that we should have a preliminary plan, which should then be submitted to the different committees, so that we would all work in harmony." *Informal Hearing*, p. 78. For the joint committee idea, see "A Great Park System," *Post*, March 23, 1901, p. 12.
 67. F. L. Olmsted, Jr., "Washington Park System," March 19, 1901, Olmsted Associates, Box 134, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as Olmsted Associates).

68. Given the often cited statements by Moore suggesting that the choice of McKim as the third commissioner was a foregone conclusion, it is startling to read Olmsted's account of his first conversation with Burnham about this matter: "He spoke of McKim but proposed [Charles Sprague] Sargent as third member. I objected inoffensively and spoke of [John] Carrere." Sargent was Director of Arnold Arboretum in Boston and an unofficial advisor to the Boston Park Department. Olmsted was then collaborating with Carrere, an architect, on the design of the Pan-American Exposition for Buffalo. After this exchange, Olmsted noted: "If I had pushed a bit more I think Mr. Burnham would have agreed, but he preferred McKim, relying upon his World's Fair experience when he said McKim was more helpful to him and more generously public spirited in advice about matters outside of his own building than any other man." They made no decision. Later that day, McMillan talked privately with Burnham and then told Moore within Olmsted's hearing that "These gentlemen... expect to select Mr. McKim as their collaborator, a selection that pleases me exceedingly and will, I know,... please the architects of the country very greatly." Olmsted, Jr., "Washington Park System," March 22, 1901, Olmsted Associates.
69. "Biographical Notes, FLO, Jr." (c. 1919), Box 176, Olmsted Associates.
70. "Informal Hearing," p. 73.
71. Olmsted, "Washington Park System," March 22, 1901. The *Post* article, "A Great Park System," gave the \$10,000 figure and also noted that Sargent might become the third commissioner.
72. Letter from Daniel H. Burnham to Charles F. McKim, April 15, 1901, McKim, Mead & White papers, New York Historical Society (hereafter cited as McKim, Mead & White papers).
73. Field, "City Planning of Daniel Burnham," pp. 37-58.
74. When Burnham first reached Washington, March 21, it must be noted, he had not yet begun to think big. He had not attended the AIA meetings in December and probably knew little, if anything, about the local situation. Thinking in terms of parks, he suggested Sargent as a third commissioner when Olmsted and he conferred on March 22 (note 68 above). At this point, Burnham accepted the "preliminary plan" concept. As Olmsted noted, they both agreed that the "report and plans must be as general in terms as possible so as not to tie things up too tight and so as not to offer many points for attack." Olmsted then knew much more about the AIA's campaign and suggested "that in dealing with the Mall and public buildings we should be forced to be somewhat specific." But Burnham demurred, saying, according to Olmsted, that "he did not see why we should." Olmsted, "Washington Park System," March 22, 1901. By late March, early April, Burnham had clearly taken charge, outlining Commission procedures and deciding that the Commission must travel to Europe. Letter from Daniel H. Burnham to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., March 29, 1901, McKim, Mead & White papers; Moore, *Burnham*, Vol. 1, p. 142.
75. Letter from Daniel H. Burnham to Charles F. McKim, including eleven page list, May 8, 1901, McKim, Mead & White papers.
76. Brown, *Memories*, p. 79.
77. Two letters from Daniel H. Burnham to Charles F. McKim, May 20, 1901, McKim, Mead & White papers, detail Burnham's interview with the Pennsylvania officials. At this time, Burnham favored locating the new terminal to the south of the Mall. "The Washington Park Commission of 1901," p. 10, Partridge papers.
78. Letter from Charles Moore to James McMillan, May 31, 1901, James McMillan papers, Detroit Public Library (hereafter cited as McMillan papers). "Agreement between C. G. Curtis, ... party of the first part, and D. H. Burnham, ... F. L. Olmsted, Jr., ... and C. F. McKim, parties of the second part," June 12, 1901, McKim, Mead & White papers. Curtis was to receive \$4,000 for professional services and \$9,000 for expenses.
79. In all that Moore wrote about the Commission, this is his only acknowledgement, however veiled, that the Commission exceeded its instructions. Moore, McKim, p. 188.
80. William T. Partridge, "McMillan Commission: Personal Recollections," pp. 3, 15, Partridge papers. Moore's story as related by Partridge is consistent with other known facts about the Commission's dealings with the railroad and helps to explain why the well known London conference between Burnham and Cassatt on the terminal question in mid-July went so smoothly and quickly. At that conference, Burnham apparently learned for the first time of the golf course decision. For accounts of the London conference, see Hines, *Burnham of Chicago*, p. 149, and Moore, McKim, pp. 191-92, 198.
81. Letter from Daniel H. Burnham to A. J. Cassatt, June 11, 1901, McMillan papers.
82. Moore, *Burnham*, Vol. 1, p. 158.
83. Disbursements recorded, May 3, 1901, through September 5, 1902: George C. Curtis, \$24,479.57; McKim, Mead & White and Charles F. McKim, \$17,065.98; Daniel H. Burnham, \$1,556.45; F. L. Olmsted, \$1,698.44; James G. Langdon, \$1,971.29; Charles Moore, \$6,099.13; Jules Guerin, \$425.00; Architectural Press, \$243.20; and J. H. Gallinger, \$82.60. "Expenses of Select and Special Committees," U.S. Senate, Contingent Expenses, Ledger for 1897-1901, Vol. C-41, pp. 141-143; and Ledger for 1901-1907, Vol. C-42, pp. 111-118. Record Group 46, National Archives. These payments excluded professional fees, which each Commissioner waived. The pattern of disbursements substantiates Burnham's characterization of the division of responsibility among the Commissioners after their return from Europe, as recalled by Langdon: "The Mall is Charlie's, the parks are 'Rick's' [Olmsted], and the Rail Road problem is mine." Letter from James G. Langdon to William T. Partridge, December 17, 1923, Partridge papers.
- Partridge headed the "drafting force" to which McKim assigned the task of working up the architectural features of the Mall design, such as the monument gardens. Anyone interested in the Mall as then conceived should consult Partridge's often vivid recollections. Partridge makes clear that Olmsted played a significant role in conceiving the basic design of the Mall. At one point, Partridge even credited Olmsted with "the original idea for the Mall treatment," referring to the general arrangement, not the monument gardens and other architectonic components. "Personal Recollection of the McMillan Commission by William A. Partridge" (typescript ms.), p. 38, Partridge papers.
84. Letter from James McMillan to Charles Moore, August 30, 1901, Charles Moore papers, Library of Congress.
85. "Some Popular Misconceptions," n.d., McKim, Mead & White

papers. This skillfully drawn fact sheet defended the Commission chiefly against charges of extravagance.

86. Moore, ed., *Improvement of the Park System*, pp. 23-71.
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-122
88. Reys, *Monumental Washington*, p. 144.
89. Letter from Charles Moore to Charles F. McKim, March 25, 1902, McKim, Mead & White papers.
90. For the planning motto identified with Burnham, see Moore, *Burnham*, Vol. 2, p. 147.

The McMillan Commission's Trip to Europe

CYNTHIA R. FIELD
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

The Inspiration for the Trip

On March 8, 1901, the Senate adopted a resolution that the Committee on the District of Columbia, chaired by the Senator for Michigan, James McMillan, should consider plans for the improvement of the park system. The resolution empowered the Committee to secure the advice of experts who came to be known as the McMillan Commission. The McMillan Commission reunited a number of the most prominent figures in the planning and creation of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893: Daniel Hudson Burnham, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and Charles Follen McKim. A fourth figure from the Fair of 1893, Frederick Law Olmsted, was represented on the Commission by his talented and able son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. As a result of their experience in the creation of the popular Exposition, these men, each with widely differing backgrounds, came to the Washington commission with a sense of bonding which enabled them to work together in a particularly harmonious fashion.

At the first meeting of the Senate Park Commission, McMillan directed attention to the L'Enfant Plan with which the Commission began its study.¹ The members of the Commission studied all available material on the L'Enfant plan. They began, as had L'Enfant, by familiarizing themselves with the topography and condition of the site, going so far as the then remote areas of Anacostia, Arlington, and the Cabin John Bridge.² They found that the development of Washington had drifted from L'Enfant's intention. Vistas planned by L'Enfant had been blocked by buildings. Lots had been over-built and space designated to be open had been taken over by commercial usage.³ The Mall had been cut into fragments: two sections had been developed individually as informal parks; one area had been given over to a railroad station with its extensive trackage; and one end had been given over to small businesses and boarding houses.⁴ The Washington Monument site, meant to be the crossing of the two main axes, had been built some 400 feet off center.

In addition to familiarizing themselves with Washington, Burnham, McKim, and Olmsted made use of a naval steamer to visit the outstanding Georgian manor houses of Maryland and Virginia. They inspected Stratford Hall, Carter's Grove, Brandon, Westover, Shirley, Wye, and Whitehall. In their unrestored condition these estates bore no relation to large-scale landscape planning such as was called for in Washington. Only one stop, that at Williamsburg, bore a real relation to the work at hand. Of course the planning of Williamsburg had been long neglected, but enough remained to indicate an axial plan.⁵ Here was a real American precedent for the proposed axial treatment of the Mall area of Washington, yet none of the members of the Commission made any reference to it in their correspondence on the plan.

In this omission there is clear indication of the degree to which the Commission stubbornly looked across the ocean for

aesthetic example. In regard to the elements of planning, their vision was broad enough only for those design formulae done in the Baroque spirit which they were to see on their next viewing trip, one which took them to Europe at government expense. At a time when a European junket at public expense was still unprecedented, this trip was clearly of great importance to the Commission. Burnham justified it by saying, "how else can we refresh our minds except by seeing, with the Washington work in view, all those large things done by others... and surely the Government has the right to expect of us the very best we can give."⁶

The European Trip

As early as March 26, 1901, Burnham had proposed to McMillan that the Commission go to Europe as a body to study parks and their relationship to public buildings. By June a tentative travel program had been sketched. Wishing to have a deeper understanding of the L'Enfant approach, Burnham, McKim, and Olmsted felt that they needed concentrated exposure to the formal landscape tradition of which this plan was a part. They wanted to study not only the formal gardens of Le Notre and others, but also those Baroque and Neo-Baroque cities noted for dignity, good order, and beauty—Rome, Paris, Vienna, Budapest, and London.⁷

The party sailing on the *Deutschland* on June 13 consisted of Burnham, McKim, Olmsted, and Charles Moore, aide to Senator McMillan, all lodged in adjoining accommodation to maximize easy communication and actual working time. Days and nights were spent discussing aspects of the plan. They even took their meals in a small grillroom in order to be able to continue discussions without interruption. It was an extension of the intense spirit of cooperativeness which Burnham discovered and nurtured during the World's Columbian Exposition of which he had been the director. The late nights of good food and good conversation among the little group of artists and architects at the "White City" would be repeated across Europe.⁸

While Burnham initiated the trip, it was Olmsted who drew up the itinerary which he based on the work of Andre Le Notre and on his influence. Olmsted was in charge of a set of maps of the districts and the cities visited. With a tripod, cameras and a set of lenses, he chronicled the trip with a prodigious number of photographs.

Led by McKim, the group paid a visit of homage to the Ecole des Beaux Arts and then drove about Paris seeing the Tuileries Gardens and the Latin Quarter. McKim communicated his distaste for the work of the modern French architects, but he also revealed his pleasure in the visual unity of the city. He showed the others how the various elements—the long vistas, the use of trees, the siting of public buildings, the squares, the

arches, and the like—were so interwoven as to form a single harmonious whole. Watching the dawn come up over Paris from their hotel rooms, Burnham wrote, “everything historic unfolded before me and before retiring I understood the map of Paris.”⁹

After a short stay in Paris, the group traveled to Rome by way of the Alps and Genoa. They worked at a concentrated pace, trying to absorb the details of Roman city and landscape design in only three days.¹⁰ The party visited the gardens of villas in the city: Olmsted’s photographs include several taken in the Belvedere garden of the Vatican, the gardens of the Villa Medici (French Academy) and the Villa Aurora (American Academy).¹¹ Other photographs reveal that the members were interested in the fountains, streets, and street furniture of Rome.



Villa Albani, Rome, 1901 *Courtesy of the Commission of Fine Arts*

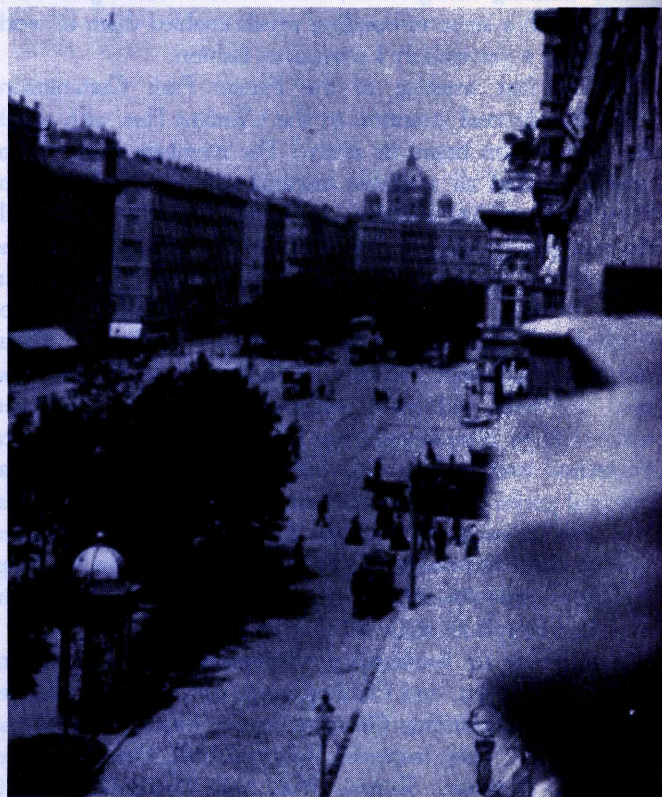
Many photographs were taken in the ruined garden of Raphael’s Villa Madama and at the Villa Albani. The grounds of the Villa Albani were unusual in Italy for their similarity to the French eighteenth-century type of garden layout. Near the house was a sunken garden enclosed by terraces and at the farther end the view was terminated by a semicircular portico. The chief feature of this garden was the extensive use of antique sculpture and archaeological artifacts as decorative elements.¹² Olmsted’s photographs of many of these testify to their interest for the group. The general influence of the group’s journey to the Villa Albani can be inferred in the creation of the sunken Monument garden.

At the time of their visit the Villa Madama was a deserted ruin. Photographs taken there show a commanding view over the Tiber Valley and the double terraces which remained of the gardens. From the upper terrace, which seemed to be an extension of the space of the loggia, stairways descended at

each end to a lower terrace taken up by a large rectangular pool into which water gushed from monumental niches in the retaining wall. The party spent an entire day visiting this romantically abandoned site, the effect of which would also be seen in the Monument Gardens section of the Plan.¹³

The Commission went to Venice because a map of that city was among those Thomas Jefferson had sent to L’Enfant for study. The four days in Venice were spent in leisurely fashion, gliding about in a private gondola, always talking over this or that detail of the Washington plan.¹⁴ This time devoted to discussion in the midst of their travel was as important as the visual experience, contributing to the particularly cohesive nature of the resulting planning.

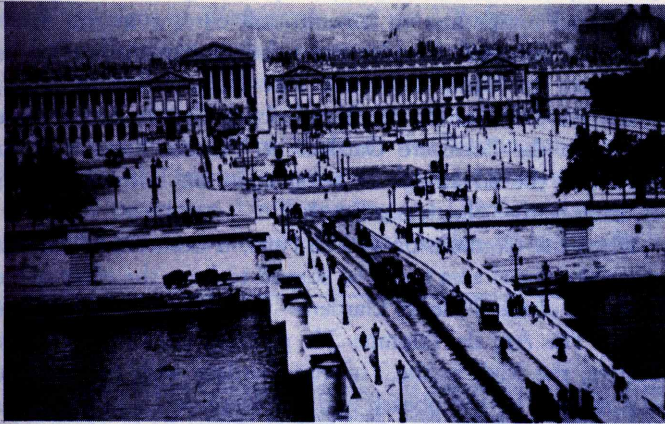
Leaving Venice on July 4, patriotically sporting red, white and blue flowers in their buttonholes, the party arrived in Vienna early the next day. The three elements of Vienna which most impressed the group were the Ring Strasse or circular boulevards, the gardens at Schoenbrunn done in the French style, and the gay English gardens where they lingered until 3:00 A.M. The classical pavilion known as the Gloria at Schoenbrunn probably inspired the proposed Lincoln Memorial sketched out in the Plan. New quays along the Danube also influenced the group in planning for Washington’s riverside shore.¹⁵



Ringstrasse from Hotel Bristol, Vienna, 1901
Courtesy of the Commission of Fine Arts

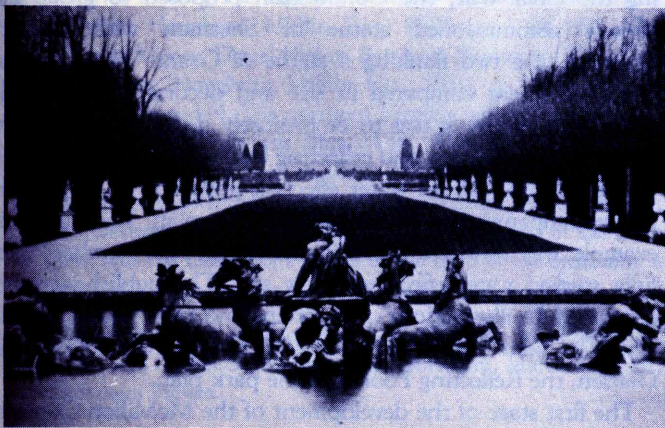
In making their suggestions for treatment of the Potomac’s bank, the Commission used as illustration a picture of the quays and Corso of Budapest. In Budapest Burnham noted the pleasing effects of a uniform cornice line, a feature also familiar from the Great Court of the Columbian Exposition, which became an important element of the Washington Plan.¹⁶ On the long train ride from Budapest to Paris, members took the opportunity to digest their impressions. With their thoughts on

Washington, McKim and Olmsted sketched out details of the plan while their enthusiasm for the European examples was fresh.¹⁷



Place de la Concorde, Paris, 1901
Courtesy of the Commission of Fine Arts

Back in Paris the group was again subject to the enthusiasm of McKim for French planning. Standing on a terrace overlooking the Place de la Concorde, McKim observed that this could be seen as a model of Washington as a city designed as a work of art—the Palace of the Tuileries as the Capitol, the Tuileries Gardens as the Mall, the Obelisk in the crossing of two Paris axes as the Washington Monument. A full day was given over to the rounds at Versailles.¹⁸ Many photographs were taken showing especially the Basin of Latona and the “Tapis Vert.” The report contained four photographs from Versailles, one of which, showing an avenue in the park, had an inscription suggesting a similar measured open vista for Washington.



Versailles, 1901
Courtesy of the Commission of Fine Arts

Burnham enjoyed the contrast of the great Beech trees and the formal gardens at Fontainebleau.¹⁹ One photograph of Fontainebleau was used in the report to suggest the canal treatment west of the Monument looking toward the proposed Lincoln Memorial. In the same photograph is a fountain which was also used in one of the renderings of what the Mall treatment might look like.²⁰

Of all the gardens visited none was more influential than Le Notre's masterwork at Vaux-le-Vicomte. In the publication of

the Plan, some details from Vaux appear to have been used such as in the design of the balustrade for the suggested terrace around the Washington Monument and a proposed fountain basin on the Mall. General formal layout used in the Plan also related closely to that of Vaux. The prodigious number of photographs taken at Vaux alone give an indication of the extent to which the Commission members were impressed with this landscape design.

A day spent traveling along the Thames River in England inspired thoughts of using the Potomac for pleasure boating.²¹ McKim determined that the width of the grass carpet between rows of trees at Hatfield House should serve for the grassy central plot of the Mall. The grouping of four trees on either side of the Mall was suggested by the six rows of trees on either side of a central grass plot at Bushy Park. Windsor served to warn them against using a drive down the center of the Mall, as L'Enfant had done.²²

The party sailed on the steamer *Deutschland* on July 26. The greater part of each day was spent in working over the plans for the Mall and for many details such as the placement of the proposed President's house. The monument received a great deal of attention. Not all their time was spent in work. Shuffleboard and pleasant meals taken in the grill relieved the pace and served to bond the group together.²³

Influence of the Trip

The most important decision the group made was the re-establishment of the Mall. Rather than return to the Grand Avenue which L'Enfant had laid out, the group substituted a new version which they based on the boulevard concept as derived from the Champs Elysees in Paris with several parallel rows of trees and pavements and strips of turf. The central feature was no longer a thoroughfare but a greensward similar to the “Tapis Vert” at Versailles. This vision was already in mind when Frederick Olmsted, Jr. described it in his address to the AIA Meeting in 1900. Naturally the Champs Elysees and the “Tapis Vert” were important objects of study on the trip. While traveling the group, primarily McKim and Olmsted, made the design decisions which resulted in the final form of the Mall as published by the Commission.²⁴

The length of the Mall was understood in the context of the work of Le Notre. The force of the Versailles scheme as a model of formal city planning lay in the measured ordering of spaces along an extended central axis. Circuses containing monuments or fountains served to control the vista. Transverse axes served a double purpose in giving scale to the perspective and opening up new spaces adjoining the central axis. Secondary axes provided direct access to architectural elements or spaces dedicated to various public uses. The Mall area was to be restored to this model. Where the primary transverse axis was intended to cross the Mall, the Commission marked its importance as a formal garden parterre with water effects. The garden effects and the cross-axis were used between Seventh and Ninth Streets and at the crossing of the Capitol and the White House axes. The fountains and reflecting pool of the Washington Plan, the measured vistas, the parterres, potted shaped trees, and sculpture directly reflected the influence of Versailles.

Treatment of the Washington Monument was considered the "gem of the Mall system." Lying at the very center of the new plan, it set the tone of dignity and monumentality which the Commission hoped to establish for the Capital. Not only did the Monument lack relationship with both Capitol and White House, but it rose unceremoniously from a small grassy hill. No part of the study required more elaborate design than this section.²⁵

Approaching the Washington Monument, the ranks of elms four abreast were to climb the slope gradually and spread to the right and left on extended terraces. This enclosure of the monument by the elms was devised by McKim and Olmsted as a result of their experience of European gardens. Travelling on the long trip to Paris from Budapest, the two sketched out the scheme on quadrille paper.²⁶ The terraced grove would be a broad and stately base for the obelisk and would provide shady places of rest with handsome views of the city. McKim envisioned this as a shrine which would serve as a contemplative spot within the city. From the Monument platform, steps 300 feet wide were to descend 40 feet to a sunken garden lying on the cross-axis of the White House, the true line passing through the center of a great round pool. In this way the interrelation of White House crossing and Capitol axis intended by L'Enfant at the Monument would be re-established.²⁷

This treatment of the Monument area shows how the plan was influenced by the member's experience of Italian gardens on their junket. The Italian influence appeared in the tree-lined terraces creating multiple levels. The continued use of parterres and water effects secured in niches beneath the terraces suggests the influence of Villa Madama where a similar arrangement had been seen. This area was to be enriched with fountains, hedges, trees, statuary and urns, as well as temple-like structures in the fashion of all the Italian gardens.

The Roman experience encouraged them to plan on a Roman scale. Olmsted was directed to photograph and measure stairways with their risers, treads and balustrades. It was felt that the Washington heat demanded that the city be fitted as was Rome, with numerous fountains. On the steps of a little temple at the Villa Borghese they made the decision that the proposed bridge to Arlington should be of a monumental rather than utilitarian nature and an element of extension of the design in spirit was well as in plan. They were impressed by the architectonic quality of Roman gardens, deciding that "simplicity, directness and the subordination of ornament to structural uses should prevail." Also they agreed that the effects produced by tree-crowned terraces should be sought where the configuration of the land permitted.²⁸

Roman influence can only definitely be discerned in the formal tree-lined terrace designed to surround the Washington Monument. Ultimately, the Washington plan had more of France than Italy in its design. Design elements such as the Mall, the avenues, the vistas, and the park system all derive from the French example. It was more in the spirit of solemnity, pomp, and the architectonic grandeur of the plan that the influence of the Roman leg of the trip may be seen. Burnham said that it was "as if the very spirit of Rome—its ordered bigness, its grandeur, its essence of the eternal—stole into their souls."²⁹

Beyond the Washington Monument, the Commission proposed a monument to Lincoln. The type of the Monument was

very specific—a columnar portico bearing an inscription from the Gettysburg Address "or from some one of the immortal messages of the saviour of the Union."³⁰ According to an observer, McKim felt that by emphasizing the message the traditional antipathies to Lincoln still current in the South could be assuaged. Consequently the monument was to be based on the open decorative type of neo-classical portico which was to be seen in the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin or the Gloria in the Belvedere Gardens at Vienna. Such an open form had the advantage of being open on both sides, thus favoring neither North nor South.³¹

When the Commission was in Paris, it occurred to McKim that this central area could be shaped to have the effect of the grouping of the Tuileries Gardens—the Place de La Concorde—and The Arc de Triomphe. He pictured the Capitol as the Louvre, the Mall as the Tuileries Gardens with their central axis marked by the obelisk and the Place de La Concorde as the Washington Monument. By this analogy, McKim determined that the treatment of the 400 reclaimed acres south and west of the original river bank should be a major extension of the axis terminated by a strong horizontal feature such as the Arc de Triomphe. The fact of the terminus and its circular setting but not the scale or the design were based on the Parisian example.³²

Between the monuments to Washington and Lincoln was to be a canal 3,600 feet long and 200 feet wide with nearly central cross arms. This effect was in frank imitation of Versailles and Fontainebleau in France and Hampton Court in England where similar canals had seemed to them to suggest repose and to add great beauty.³³

The Place de la Concorde appeared once more in the plans of the Commission as the inspiration for Union Square. At the Capitol end of the Mall the Commission desired a great open square enriched with parterres. To honor the union saved during the Civil War, the Commission proposed to group the already commissioned statue of Sherman with one of Sheridan, the two flanking a statue of Grant. The Commission's treatment compared in size and decorative detail with the French model. It was to be profusely decorated with water effects, both fountains and reflecting basins.³⁴

The extensive use of water effects is apparent in the renderings accompanying the presentation of the plan. The European example was nowhere more in evidence. The members carefully studied water effects at every site. The published report contained 16 illustrations of fountains and large basins. Results could be seen especially in Union Square, the Monument Garden, the Reflecting Pool, and the park plan.³⁵

The first stage of the development of the McMillan Commission Plan was done in the brief, intense period of time the Commission members spent travelling together. Upon their return, McKim set up a studio in New York where he could supervise design work on the central part of the plan while Olmsted, in Washington, developed the park plan with its comprehensive treatment of the District.³⁶ According to William T. Partridge, who was in charge of the New York staff, it was in the five weeks of travel that the creative part of the plan was developed.³⁷ Therefore, the significance of the trip cannot be understated.

Two categories of the experience contributed to the nature of the future plan. The first aspect of the experience to be con-

sidered is the process. The group travelled together from the time they began to explore Washington and its surroundings. They isolated themselves from other travelers and made use of every assistance to concentrate on their work. They took with them the plans of Washington and the L'Enfant plan. It was here that Burnham made his greatest contribution to the plan, in his dogged determination that every experience should be immediately related back to the planning of Washington.

The solutions to the problems in the Washington plan all derive from the second category of the experience which was the visual experience. Understanding the L'Enfant plan as an outgrowth of the tradition of formal garden planning which

reached its culmination in the work of Andre Le Notre, Olmsted planned their itinerary to study the work of Le Notre and its precedents. Secondly, the group visited cities which incorporated elements of the formal tradition into their planning. For each of them the trip was a broad education. Burnham wrote to his wife, "You have no idea how much I am learning as we go on. The special things I never paid any attention to are the ones I am now studying."³⁸ Even McKim, who had previously had the most European exposure, referred often to the trip in discussing precedents as he and his staff worked on the details of the Plan.³⁹ That the lessons were seminal ones for the development of Washington cannot be doubted.

1. United States Congress, Senate, *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia*, 57th Cong., 1 Sess., 1902, Rpt. 166, hereafter cited as *Plan*, p. 7. "Resolved: That the Committee on the District of Columbia be, and it is hereby directed, to consider the subject and report to the Senate plans for the development and improvement of the entire Park System of the District of Columbia. For the purpose of preparing such plans, the committee may sit during the recess of Congress, and may secure the services of such experts as may be necessary for a proper consideration of the subject. The expenses of such investigation shall be paid from the contingent fund of the Senate."
2. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, April 10, 1901, Burnham Papers, Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago.
3. Thomas Adams, *Outline of Town and City Planning* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1935), p. 169.
4. "The Improvement of Washington", *Scientific American*, 86 (February 15, 1902), p. 108.
5. Charles Moore, *The Life and Times of Charles Follen McKim* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), pp. 186-187. Also Charles Moore, *Daniel Hudson Burnham, Planner of Cities*, Vol. I, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921) pp. 144-146. The quote is on p. 144. The northern Virginia trip was April 19-22. The Maryland trip was May 14-16. "However Williamsburg had its lesson; for here in outline is the plan of the Mall in Washington with the Capitol at one end of the broad parkway; the College of William and Mary at the other end of the main axis, and the Governor's Palace at the head of the cross-axis, a location similar to that of the White House." (p. 145).
6. Daniel Burnham to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., March 29, 1901, and Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, March 26, 1901, Burnham Papers.
7. Moore, *Washington: Past and Present* (New York: The Century Company, 1929), pp. 261-262.
8. Moore, McKim, pp. 187-189.
9. Moore, McKim, p. 189. Daniel Burnham, *Diary of 1901*, June 19, Burnham Papers. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, June 21, 1901, Burnham Papers, "Every idea I ever had, of architecture and landscape is already modified, this is the source of things. The Frenchmen can no longer themselves do anything at all worthwhile, but their old world and their traditions teach the world and at home, we can do things worthwhile...."
10. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, June 23 and June 25, 1901, Burnham Papers.
11. Daniel Burnham, *Diary of 1901*, June 22, Burnham Papers. The photographs referred to in the paper are from the scrapbook of Olmsted in the Library of Congress. Copies have been made available to me through the generous assistance of the Commission on Fine Arts.
12. Edith Wharton, *Italian Villa and Their Gardens* (New York: The Century Co., 1904), pp. 113-114.
13. Wharton, p. 83. Moore, *Burnham*, I, p. 151. Moore, McKim, p. 151.
14. Moore, *Burnham*, p. 153.
15. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, July 5, 1901, Burnham Papers. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, July 6, 1901. "We certainly are learning a lot of this trip." Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, July 7, 1901. For influence of Vienna quays cf., Peter B. Wright, "Daniel Hudson Burnham: An Appreciation," *Architectural Record*, 22 (August 1912), pp. 194-95.
16. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, July 9, 1901, Burnham Papers. "This town has business streets second to none. They are built up with the uniform height of cornice, four or five stories high. The architecture is generally good and so the streets look exceedingly orderly and pleasant." Cf. *Plan*, illustrations No. 192 and 187.
17. William T. Partridge, "Recollections," a manuscript prepared c. 1940 in the Historical Data File of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, now National Capital Planning Commission, R.G. 328, National Archives, p. 3.
18. Moore, McKim, p. 198.
19. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, July 14, 1901, Burnham Papers.
20. *Plan*, Illustrations No. 39 and 100.
21. Moore, McKim, p. 199. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, July 21, 1901, Burnham Papers. "We shall do all we can in Washington to make the people use the river."
22. Daniel Burnham to Frank J. Foster, September 22, 1908, Burnham Papers. "When the Washington Commission was in Europe we measured widths of Avenues, the spacing of trees, and the heights of the hedges, trying to get the sense of scale of all the good things, which sometimes has reference to a man as the measure but far more often to some great building or even the size of the tree growth...."
23. Moore, *Burnham*, pp. 155-156.

24. Partridge, p. 40.
25. *Plan*, pp. 47-48.
26. Partridge, p. 3.
27. *Plan*, pp. 47-48. The report does not make clear the slight skewing of the Mall axis, an inspiration which restored at least half of the intended communication between Monument and other important sites. Olmsted had previously proposed simply ignoring the differences between the central axis from the Capitol and the position of the Monument. As the Mall was largely, according to reports, the work of McKim, it may be assumed that McKim was the author of this device. The open area of the Mall is referred to in the *Plan* under the subheading "The Tapis Vert," an open reference to the influence of the European example. Note that it was to be undulating, not flat.
28. Moore, McKim, pp. 191-193.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Plan*, p. 52. It was proposed to place a statue of Abraham Lincoln in front of this portico. Both McKim and Burnham were in their formative years during the Civil War period and, despite the passage of 36 years, their admiration for the brave troops and the martyred President retained the reverence of youth.
31. Partridge, pp. 43-44.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 42 and Moore, McKim, p. 193.
33. Moore, McKim, pp. 55-57 and Partridge, p. 44
34. Partridge, p. 103.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
38. Daniel Burnham to Mrs. Burnham, July 11, 1901, Burnham Library.
39. Partridge, p. 33.

Daniel Burnham, Then and Now

FREDERICK GUTHEIM
GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Some justice may be done to the memory of Daniel H. Burnham by recalling my experience when appointed secretary of the Illinois Housing Association in 1933. I did not require much persuasion to accept this job but I felt it obligatory to ask a few questions. "Who is the chairman of the board of the Association," I inquired. "Jane Addams," was the reply. "Where will I have my office?" brought an equally memorable response. "In Orchestra Hall, where the son of Daniel Burnham, Alfred Burnham (who was then living in Mexico), has given the Association the use of his office."

And so it happened that for the next few months, while lobbying for the state housing enabling act, I kept company with the Burnham papers that have since been deposited, across Michigan Boulevard, in the Burnham Library of the Art Institute.

I am and was then a Washingtonian. I was well aware of the great architectural and urbanistic contributions Burnham had made to this city. I was fully informed concerning the unique design of the Union Station, an architectural achievement made possible only by an exceptional federal subsidy, without which we should have had something more approximating Burnham's Pennsylvania Railroad Station in Pittsburgh. And it had already been impressed upon me that the then chairman of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (as it was then styled) was Frederic Delano, a one-time Chicagoan and former railroad president. And I was already an historian, even an urban historian.

In spite of all these qualifications, I was not sufficiently curious to look once into that rank of filing cabinets that held not only the papers of Daniel Burnham but those of his partners, particularly Edward Bennett, the chairman of the design committee that produced the Federal Triangle. To the historian of 1933 the significance of these accomplishments was all too obvious—and all too irrelevant.

As a youthful (and brash) architectural critic I would have had to say I preferred Burnham's Pittsburgh station, and despised his eclectic effort in Washington, with its neoclassical sculpture and lapidary words (chosen by President Charles Eliot of Harvard). Even three or four years later, when I had to write the description of Union Station in the WPA Washington guide, I had difficulty swallowing it. Indeed, not until I wrote an article about the preservation threat to the Union Station in the *Washington Post Magazine* did I really come to appreciate the architectural and urbanistic significance of the station, not to say Burnham's political achievement in bringing it off with a two level solution that can well be compared with Wilgus' Park Avenue plan for the New York Grand Central Station.

My point is that beneath the city beautiful trappings we can discover more fundamental design issues. Burnham becomes interesting for his managerial abilities, his mastery of railroad and corporate structures, his ability to organize at large scale,

his planning and siting. These were first apparent in Washington, but Manila, Chicago, San Francisco, and other city plans must not be forgotten.

I call attention, therefore, to the relatively recent appreciation of the Union Station as a work of architecture and urban design. It is an architectural metaphor for the McMillan plan. I know we are here to look into its neoclassical character, but I would like to comment on more than this echo of the Chicago World's Fair, more than this Victorian exercise in sublime spaces, more even than the gateway to a national capital city. We need to look at the engineering and planning aspects of the Station. It is representative of nineteenth century constituent architecture. We need to compare it with other contemporary efforts—with Eliel Saarinen's neoclassical railroad station in Helsinki.

The Union Station is not just a work out of the past. It has a message for the present. If we are to preserve it, to adapt it, to add to it, as is now being done, we must first understand it. The immense concourse, the impressive loggia facing the Capitol, even more than the airy spaciousness of its interiors all convey a sense of public use. They dignify the tens of thousands of travellers who once moved through them. Columbus Plaza (echo of Chicago's 1893 celebration) is another element of the Union Station design that has suffered a tortured existence, neither understood nor much improved by the suggestions of the most recent Master Plan for the United States Capitol.

The historical relativism I have just illustrated by Daniel Burnham can equally be used to interpret the fate of the McMillan plan. Born before its time, the McMillan plan came to a peak of acceptance in 1926 when the Federal Triangle and the Mall plans were adopted and the National Capital Park and Planning Commission created. By the mid-thirties its authority had waned—exemplified by the furor over the siting and size of the Jefferson Memorial—the outcome of which was to reduce the original John Russell Pope scheme by one third, and move it out of the Tidal Basin altogether. The rise of modern architecture further eclipsed the McMillan plan, although the long delay in implementing Edward Bennett's Apex building and the completion of William Adams Delano's hemicycle, involving the removal of the Old City Post Office showed that the other factors were present in these decisions.

One could also cite the rise and fall of the early Commission of Fine Arts, the authority of Charles Moore, and other indicators. These, as well as the rows over the buildings of the Department of Agriculture, the Lincoln Memorial and, indeed, the so-called "adoption" of the McMillan plan itself are questions the architectural and urban historian can well investigate further.

It would be a mistake to interpret these events too narrowly in terms of local Washington events, or even as they might be seen in the context of architectural history. Washington was,

as always, a mirror of larger issues. It has always been interesting to me to ask why some of the major figures in American architecture never received commissions to design buildings here. Not just Frank Lloyd Wright but Eliel Saarinen and many establishment architects. Some, like Eric Gugler, tried hard. Some made designs but never saw their work executed. This question goes with another that is perhaps more fundamental, whether our city is to be regarded as an ideal city or a representative one. It goes with the related issue of architectural review and the role of the Commission of Fine Arts. Whatever one concludes, it will contribute strongly to the question of the Washington architectural identity—whatever we decide that is or should be.

At the present moment we are inclined to view the design of our capital city in the context of the City Beautiful movement. But was it a reflection of this movement, or did it lead in its formulation? This chicken-and-egg question has had much light shed upon it in recent years, but we seem still far from a definitive answer. The emerging organization that calls itself The Planning History Group has also started to raise questions that may go beyond the formalities of urban design.

My personal interests have also veered from architecture to the broader questions of urban design, especially a design philosophy that includes open spaces, parks and landscape architecture. The Washington environment is rich in these elements and their historical development needs closer analysis than it has received. In the fall of 1985 the National Association for Olmsted Parks will be meeting in Washington and there will be an appropriate occasion to look at Olmsted's plan for the Capitol Grounds, recently reviewed in the Master Plan for the U.S. Capitol; the closely related plans for the Mall which exhibit not only Olmsted Jr.'s hand but the earlier work of Andrew Jackson Downing. We shall have also a better view of what the Olmsted firm did with the Zoo and Rock Creek Park, not to mention their first educational campus, for Gallaudet College. But most important for our purpose here is the contribution Olmsted Jr. made to the McMillan Plan, its reflection of contemporary park work in Boston and Chicago, not to mention the stimulating heritage of landscape design in England, France and Italy, as it was learned in the Commission's trip in 1901.

The Union Station is not just a work out of the past. It has a message for the present. It is to preserve it, to adapt it, to add to it, as is now being done, we must first understand it. The message concerns the importance of its location. It is not more than the any other station in the world. It is a sense of public use. They dignify the use of thousands of travelers who once moved through them. Columbia Plaza (also of Chicago's 1893 celebration) is another element of the Union Station design that has helped a tortured existence, neither understood nor much improved by the suggestion of the most recent Master Plan for the United States Capitol.

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Make No Little Plans . . . I Have a Dream

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The first part of this title comes from a passage written not by Daniel Burnham, as is often thought, but by a colleague, Willis Polk, who assembled a collage of phrases to summarize the great Chicagoan's urban vision—a vision that became virtually synonymous with notions of civic improvement for a generation of reform-minded citizens. The second part, of course, was uttered by Martin Luther King, Jr., at a rally held in front of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963—a speech that has become a quintessential expression of this nation's continued search for freedom and equality. While neither statement was made about the Mall itself, the first one vividly suggests the spirit in which it was reconstituted at the turn of the twentieth century, and the second one epitomizes the role this space has assumed as a civic forum.

The McMillan Plan, with the Mall at its centerpiece, has been the subject of mounting interest over the past two decades as scholars have begun in earnest to reassess the meaning of the City Beautiful Movement and academic design to which that movement was so closely tied.¹ The two studies presented at this symposium underscore how rich the field of inquiry is. Not only was the design prepared by Burnham, McKim, and Olmsted of seminal importance in the history of American planning, the evolution of that scheme over the next three quarters of a century represents a rare, indeed unmatched, example of long-term consistency in implementation. Most of the original plan's details were altered in execution, but the underlying idea remains lucid and strong.

The challenge to "make no little plans" reflected not only the scale of design Burnham considered imperative to bring order to the metropolis; the phrase also echoes a drive to improve design standards—a drive that was pursued with missionary zeal. The academic principles to which Burnham and many colleagues subscribed constituted more than a new approach to architecture and urban development. For them these principles provided the basis for a civilizing influence which could alleviate the effects of what was seen as the overly materialistic values of post-Civil-War society. Cities had become large, prosperous, and a central force in the progress of the nation; now they must also become beautiful. Beauty was considered to be far more than a visual garnish; it was a prime agent in enhancing metropolitan life and, ultimately, in sustaining economic vitality.

Fulfilling this agenda required a broad consensus and national leadership. In the design fields, that leadership had begun to emerge during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Burnham, McKim, and Olmsted ranked among the most prominent figures whose work commanded respect across the country. But an equivalent patronage was needed. If the federal government, long viewed as a propagator of architectural banalities, could now assume the role of an exemplar, a major step could be taken in transforming the urban landscape. The McMillan Plan was conceived as a linchpin, estab-

lishing a new standard of quality for the improvement of American communities. And, over the next four decades, many of the buildings erected as part of the plan were designed by some of America's most eminent firms. With the work of Henry Bacon, Arthur Brown, Jr., Carrère and Hastings, Paul Cret, Delano & Aldrich, Cass Gilbert, Bertram Goodhue, Charles Platt, and John Russell Pope, as well as by Burnham and McKim, Mead & White, this precinct became a pantheon of luminaries in the academic movement.

While proponents of that movement emphasized the need to understand the past and sought to forge links with the spirit of work from previous eras, they also shunned revivalism. Precedent was the foundation of design; imparting a sense of continuity with the past was among the designer's foremost obligations; but responding to contemporary conditions was equally important if the results were to be more than a pastiche. Only through the accommodation of change could design evolve in a substantive way. For Burnham and his colleagues, the basic idea embodied in L'Enfant's plan was precisely the one they considered the most appropriate for their new scheme. Yet over a century had passed; the symbolic and utilitarian program had grown much more complex. Out of necessity, the McMillan Plan had to depart from its venerated predecessor, even as it regenerated that predecessor's salient characteristics.

The European study tour undertaken by Burnham, McKim, and Olmsted was of the utmost importance on both these counts. In order to comprehend L'Enfant's objectives more fully, one must be familiar with the Baroque tradition in which he worked. Scrutinizing a range of examples was valuable both to develop a clearer sense of the underlying principles and to explore the variations possible within a common theme. From this spectrum, too, one could glean the particulars of solutions that might guide the new scheme. The objective here was not to borrow motifs, for that could be accomplished much more efficiently by consulting books, photographs, and old prints. Instead, it was to gain a degree of understanding of precedent—both in its broad conception and in its details—which no source other than firsthand investigation could provide.

As presented in the McMillan Plan and as executed over the following decades, the Mall embodies this creative process. No historic model existed for so large an open space that was integrated with a formal urban structure. The Mall is far more expansive than the grandest of European squares such as those in St. Petersburg. The scheme has a sequence of focal points inspired by that extending from the Tuileries to the Place de L'Etoile in Paris; however, the space is at once more emphatically coherent and regularized—qualities derived from the palatial gardens of Le Nôtre. The buildings that line the Mall provide a distinct architectural edge, which is softened by rows of trees, yet which plays a conspicuous role in defining large scale space rather than serving as a picturesque backdrop to be glimpsed only from certain vantage points as at Regent's Park.

The Mall buildings remain subordinate to the Capitol and to the space itself, yet are freestanding on generously dimensioned parcels and establish a monumental presence in their immediate precincts. The units that comprise the Federal Triangle, on the other hand, are generally larger and form a much denser compound that addresses the varying spatial scales of two wide boulevards, cross streets, and the Mall itself beyond. This grouping forms a compact mass which is both self-contained and acts as an agent of transition between the cohesive civic grounds on one side and the cacophonous commercial center on the other.

As a landscape design, the Mall fuses these urban qualities with those of a large city park. The latter had emerged as a potent symbol of municipal improvement during the previous decades in large part due to the work of the senior Frederick Law Olmsted. The Mall's very size, together with its many naturalistic features west of Fourteenth Street, evoke the spirit of nineteenth-century parks and suggest this place, likewise, to be a recreation ground. However, there are also pronounced departures from the conventions of park design. The reflecting pool and the Lincoln Memorial at its terminus are strictly formal elements which establish the primary order of the whole area. While not tied by the same strong axial link, the Jefferson Memorial nonetheless stands as another conspicuous ordering device, not a mere classical embellishment to a picturesque setting. Furthermore, even in the most informal areas, the use of plant material is such that the eye is carried beyond the Mall's boundaries, in contrast to the longstanding objective in park design to have self-contained zones that screen the city from view.

The Mall is both of the metropolis and apart from it. This synthesis of opposites may not have had any conscious models; however, it is a distinguishing attribute of many New England villages as they had evolved by the mid-nineteenth century, with extensive foliage both punctuating and diffusing well-developed urban order. A parallel situation can be found in Williamsburg, where a miniature, quasi-Baroque plan has long been garnished by trees and shrubbery. The scale of the Mall is another matter, yet it too alludes, again perhaps unintentionally, to another characteristic American landscape form. With great expanses of space minimally interrupted by fixtures, paths, and plantings, there is a poignant reminder of the vastness of the agrarian hinterland.

Many of the Mall's attributes did not exist, or at least were less evident, in the McMillan Plan itself; they are the product of numerous modifications made in the course of implementing the scheme. The results are in some respects quite different from those envisioned by Burnham, McKim, and Olmsted, but their essential idea has survived and has perhaps even been clarified in the process. Such long-term consistency in execution was one of the underlying aims of comprehensive planning, and was a novel concept in the United States when it was first advocated around the turn of the century.

The McMillan Plan's role in fostering the cause of comprehensive planning has been thoroughly documented by Jon Peterson. However, the notion of redevelopment on this scale had been nurtured for some years before the Senate Park Commission's establishment. Contemporary accounts of the World's Columbian Exposition reveal that the sentiment for bringing new order to the city as a whole was already strong.²

In 1898, the mayor of San Francisco, James Duval Phelan, launched a bold, though unsuccessful, campaign to create a plan for his city. Phelan's inspiration came not only from Chicago and European cities such as Paris and Vienna, but also from Berkeley, where under the aegis of Bernard Maybeck, the University of California was staging an international competition for a campus master plan (1897-1899). Far more ambitious in size and scope than any previous project for a permanent facility in the United States, the competition program called for a "City of Learning" which would take decades to realize and no doubt experience myriad changes in the course of execution, yet which would never deviate from the vision of the original scheme. Widely publicized and much heralded, the competition became the spark which ignited the fire for large-scale, long-term development guided by a master plan.³

The creation of the Senate Park Commission came two years later. The timing of both projects was propitious. After several years of depression, the country was entering a sustained period of prosperity and growth. What would have been regarded as mere dreaming in the mid-1890s could now be viewed as a serious and attainable objective. Burnham used the Berkeley competition drawings to reinforce his arguments for embarking on a new master plan for Washington. It is perhaps more than coincidence, too, that the McMillan Plan called for a civic core which resembled the organizational structure of many of the prize-winning designs for the California campus. Moreover, the Mall echoes what had become a distinct American tradition in institutional development, with an orderly arrangement of freestanding buildings set in a verdant landscape. But, for the first time, this scheme was part of an actual city and extended well beyond the central precinct.

The Mall functions well as a national civic center in part because it reiterates familiar patterns in the American landscape and in part because it is very different from any other place in the country. If this precinct is somewhat like a park and a campus, it is also like a regional shopping mall. The museums are its stores, the Capitol and White House its "majors," the presidential monuments its centerpiece sculptures. This place further bears comparison to a traditional Main Street or a more recent commercial strip in that it allows free vehicular access and movement, if only occasionally a place to park. The Mall may be first and foremost a quarter for pedestrians, yet unlike many civic centers, it is fully penetrated by streets. The avenues of commercial traffic, the queues of busses, and the hordes of Winnebagos that descend upon the Mall may seem like intrusions to some; without this perceptual accessibility, however, the Mall could well become another well-planned but lifeless space that the public is supposed to enjoy but seldom bothers to visit.

But if the Mall has many aspects to which people are accustomed and with which they feel at home, its specialness is omnipresent. The place is as unique as any tourist cliché in the world and, in contrast to most of them, it is not a building or a collection of same that is as memorable as the space itself. The overall dignity and order, combined with the utter simplicity of its parts, are hard to find anywhere else on so expansive a scale. It is this subtle, even unobtrusive, awesomeness that renders the Mall so fitting an arena for the expression of public sentiment. For bankrupt farmers, civil rights activists, advocates of disarmament, and many other groups, the Mall has become a

symbolic platform upon which to air their concerns. Fill the Mall with people and it is they more than the architecture or the landscaping that commands the eye. The space is large and it is tangent to the seats of power, but it is also a magnificent staging ground. The convention hall and sports stadium are merely shelter; the Mall is a forum, conducive to the most

unstructured activity of an individual and to a carefully orchestrated demonstration of thousands. There is probably no other civic space in the nation that is used by so many segments of society for so many purposes. Where else could Martin Luther King speak about his dream to such effect?

1. See, for instance: John W. Reps, *Monumental Washington; The Planning and Development of the Capital Center* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) chs. 3-8; Frederick Gutheim and Wilcom E. Washburn, *The Federal City: Plans and Realities* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1976) pp. 32-44; Thomas S. Hines, *Burnham of Chicago, Architect and Planner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) ch. VII; and Leland M. Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983) pp. 251-259. Concerning the academic movement, see: *The American Renaissance 1876-1917* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1980) and my "Academic Eclecticism in American Architecture," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Spring 1982, pp. 55-82.

2. See, for instance: John Coleman Adams, "What a Great City Might Be—A Lesson from the White City," *New England Magazine*, March 1896, pp. 3-13; and William Dean Howells, *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*, reprint ed. (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1961).

3. The competition program and winning entries were published in *The International Competition for the Phoebe Hearst Architectural Plan for the University of California* (San Francisco: H.S. Crocker Co., c. 1899). For background, see my *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century* (New York and Cambridge: Architectural History Foundation and MIT Press, 1983) pp. 244-251.